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Resisting Captivity:
An Analysis of the New Zealand POW Experience During World War Two

A thesis
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of the requirements for the degree
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Abstract

During World War Two more than 9,000 New Zealand servicemen were captured and imprisoned. Many of these men were confronted by the challenges of disempowerment and a prolonged imprisonment. However, histories of captivity have tended to portray the prisoner-of-war (POW) experience as a continual attempt to disrupt the enemy war effort from behind the wire. More recent scholarly works have challenged this simplistic narrative. This thesis continues this work by emphasising the diversity of resistance and the use of various forms of escapism, both physical and mental, to cope with captivity. In doing so, it explores how men constructed their individual identities, refusing to be labelled as mere prisoners.

More than escapees or saboteurs, POWs were active agents in shaping the spaces they inhabited. They implemented elements of their pre-war lives into their daily camp routines. Although these efforts never turned their camps into comfortable environments, they were an escape from the monotony of camp life. Combined with letters from loved ones, shaping the camps into more familiar spaces helped bridge the men's remoteness from New Zealand.

Through a detailed examination of New Zealand POW diaries, letters, memoirs, images and oral histories, this thesis uncovers an intimate depiction of captivity. The men's individual experiences are at the forefront. In their accounts they recorded vivid accounts of life as POWs. This thesis uses these sources to explore how men came to terms with their captivity, resisted being labelled as prisoners, and coped with being imprisoned so far from home.

Acknowledgements

As would be expected for a project this size, the thesis in front of you has been supported by a terrific group of people. First, I must thank the men whose lives are examined in this thesis. I am grateful that they were willing to document their ordeal. I hope that this study goes some way to presenting an accurate and revealing portrayal of their experiences. Thanks must also go to the men's families who donated items to research depositories. It must have been difficult to let go of these personal mementos, but sharing them has made this and future projects possible.

Unfortunately, this thesis does not cover all New Zealand POW experiences. Many accounts have been lost to time and trauma. The thesis may not represent these people, but they are not forgotten.

This project would not be possible without the incredible archival staff and material at the Kippenberger Military Archive, the Alexander Turnbull Library, the Waikato Museum and the Auckland War Memorial Museum. These depositories were most welcoming and their assistance made collecting the sources a pleasure. It is also necessary to thank the staff of the University of Waikato Library and the Thames Library. Many resources were provided through their collections and interloan services.

I need to thank my friends and family, in particular my mother, Althea. She has always been willing to read what I have written and provide suggestions.

I appreciate the support of my work colleagues, namely Cherie Staples and Scott Simpson, who have made working and studying an easy balance. They were most accommodating when I needed time off to focus on my research.

In terms of those who have guided this study, I have been fortunate to have had three incredible supervisors.

First, Professor Catharine Coleborne was my first chief supervisor and a fantastic mentor to have when examining how the men coped with captivity. Her knowledge of scholarly works was crucial to developing the framework of this study. Also, this project took a while to officially begin. Scholarship funding proved difficult to get, but Cathy was supportive throughout the process.

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Finally, I am indebted to Dr Raymond Richards, who has been involved in this study from the beginning. When struggling to find a topic to focus on, it was his assistance that I sought. His expertise and candour is evident throughout this study. Ray's assurances that this work is noteworthy provided invaluable confidence, especially since theses are written in relative seclusion.

While I was interested in studying history when I enrolled at the University of Waikato, I did not pursue the subject until my third year. At the time, I was just another business management student, studying for a qualification that I thought was necessary to "succeed" after university. Ray taught my first history paper. Even though I did not attend all the classes, it was the first time that learning was enjoyable. That experience set me on a path that has culminated in this study.

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Introduction

During World War Two, thousands of New Zealand servicemen were captured and interned in prisoner-of-war camps, scattered across Axis territories.¹ Previous studies have tended to emphasise the passivity of these prisoners of war (POWs), a powerlessness that was, on occasion, relieved by daring escape attempts. This thesis argues that New Zealand POWs were not passive subjects; instead, they were active agents in shaping the spaces they inhabited. POWs made conscious and unconscious decisions to create new structures and implement elements of their pre-war lives into their daily camp routines. Although these efforts never turned their camps into familiar environments, they were an escape from the monotony of camp life. Activities and reminders of their prior lives were essential to the men's ability to cope with captivity.

Over the duration of their captivity, POWs were often moved to different camps because of the changing war situation. Rather than a romantic tale of escapes and fighting the enemy from within, this thesis portrays the POW experience as one of dislocation, emotional isolation and a desire to mentally escape their confines. It examines the daily struggles of New Zealand POWs as revealed in their diaries, letters, images, memoirs and oral interviews. In doing so, the thesis focuses on the theme of escapism as both a physical and psychological imperative and how the POWs mentally retreated from their foreign surroundings.

This study is restricted to the experiences of New Zealanders interned in POW camps under German and Italian control. There were also New Zealanders who were captured by the Japanese in the Pacific Theatre, but their numbers pale in comparison to their European counterparts. Additionally, as social historian David

¹ Although there have been various numbers of New Zealand POWs reported, the official history of New Zealand placed the figure at 9140, a combination of army, naval and air force personnel. W. Wynne Mason, *Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939-1945: Prisoners of War* (Wellington: War History Branch, Dept. of Internal Affairs, 1954), p. v.

McGill contended, ‘They are separate experiences, too different to be worked together.’² Particularly noteworthy studies of Pacific POWs have been undertaken by Australian historians, who have done a remarkable job of analysing the complex ordeal of those involved.³ These scholarly works discuss central themes such as race, class, identity and memory construction. This thesis draws inspiration from their findings, because this literature is fundamental to our understanding of how to view the POW experience.

This study has two main objectives. First, it provides an original contribution to historical scholarship by shedding light on how New Zealand POWs both shaped and were shaped by their confined spaces. Second, it specifically examines how POWs coped with captivity by recreating pre-war activities and mentally retreating from the dismal camp space. These aims combine to argue for a broader definition of resistance. While this thesis does analyse physical escape attempts, it portrays captivity as a deeply personal ordeal where men continually tried to comprehend the strangeness of imprisonment and struggled to maintain a singular identity.

By exploring how POWs interacted and constructed their own experiences within the prison camps, this study highlights their agency and their ability to shape camp life into something more bearable. It is important to note that the effort made to implement elements of home life into their prison camps was an essential survival mechanism for New Zealand POWs, who were almost entirely isolated from their previous support networks. Reliving these prior experiences encouraged group cohesion for the POWs and reinforced their individual identities. The remembrance of a happy time, either by reconnecting with loved

² David McGill, *P.O.W: The Untold Stories of New Zealanders as Prisoners of War* (Lower Hutt: Mills Publications Ltd, 1987), p. 10.

³ Pamela Cohen, ‘Behind Barbed Wire: Sport and Australian Prisoners of War’, *Sporting Traditions*, 23, 1 (November, 2006), pp. 63-86; Peter Monteath, ‘Australian POW labour in Germany in World War II’, *Labour History*, 103 (2012), pp. 83-102; Christina Twomey, *Australia’s Forgotten Prisoners: Civilians Interned by the Japanese in World War Two* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Christina Twomey, ‘Emaciation or Emasculation: Photographic Images, White Masculinity and Captivity by the Japanese in World War Two’, *Journal of Men’s Studies*, 15 (2007), pp. 295-310.

ones via mail or enjoying leisurely activities, helped POWs escape the harsh reality of their circumstances, if only briefly. Negative elements of their home lives also seeped into POW camps, such as economic deprivation and class structure. POWs were constantly undernourished and undersupplied. However, many took part in racketeering and gambling, which further increased the privation of the more vulnerable. Higher ranks also enjoyed advantages, to the annoyance of regular soldiers, including being exempt from work parties and enjoying regular wages, which could be used to buy items for trade.

This thesis also analyses identity construction within POW camps. For many New Zealand soldiers, the thought of capture and imprisonment was far from their minds when they entered combat. However, thousands had to come to terms with the disempowerment of the transition from soldier to captive. Throughout their captivity, New Zealand POWs inhabited spaces that were foreign to them, and many struggled to connect with their new environments. Adding to this dislocation were the daily cultural clashes that took place between captives and captors. Axis victories in Europe and Africa meant that POW camps came to intern people from across the world. New Zealanders interacted with these people, and during these encounters, stark racial and cultural differences were evident. This thesis argues that New Zealanders formed an identity that was separate from other Allied nations, and that it was reinforced through the interaction with other cultures.

Historiographies: New Zealand POW Literature

The historical literature which recounts and explains New Zealand's involvement in World War Two is immense. However, the academic quality of many of these texts is questionable. In a collection of essays entitled *Kia Kaha: New Zealand in the Second World War*, historian John Crawford sought to improve the quality of this literature. Crawford argued that 'Apart from the official history series, New Zealand's historiography of the Second World War is notable for the comparative

dearth of scholarly articles and books on the subject.’⁴ Additionally, the great majority of published material have been ‘personal memoirs or popular histories that make little or no use of archival sources.’⁵

The official history series Crawford mentioned culminated in a meticulous study by W. Wynne Mason that detailed many aspects of the POW experience.⁶ In 1954, Mason and his colleagues did an excellent job of collecting and presenting the information in a digestible format. However, his attempt to provide a broad account of these men’s experiences meant that the study lacked thorough analysis of individual perspectives. Mason argued that providing an ‘impersonal presentation of the facts’ was least likely to distort the overall portrayal of the POW experience.⁷ But doing so deprived the study of a human element that is so desperately needed in a topic of this nature.

Perhaps the study reflected the time when it was written; since then the increase in popularity of social history has allowed individual voices to become a major point of history. Although the official data used in Mason’s work stands the test of time, the study was obviously hamstrung by the immediacy of its publication. Many POWs did not write or tell their stories immediately upon their return. For some it took years to comprehend what they had experienced and, in turn, to set down their account for future generations. This study is well positioned to reflect on the POW experience, because most POWs who were willing and able to tell their stories have done so by now through published and unpublished memoirs, diaries and oral interviews.

⁴ *Kia Kaha: New Zealand in the Second World War*, ed. by John Crawford (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 7.

⁵ Crawford, p. 7.

⁶ W. Wynne Mason, *Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939-1945: Prisoners of War* (Wellington: War History Branch, Dept. of Internal Affairs, 1954).

⁷ Mason, p. ix.

It is disappointing that none of the essays featured in Crawford's collection explore, or even mention, the experience of POWs. This oversight is unfortunate, because those narratives are crucial to improving our understanding of New Zealand's involvement in World War Two. However, Crawford's observation that New Zealand's military history was lacking in scholarly investigation is not uncommon. The relevance of military histories, notably those written for the general public, was explored by historians Stephen Morillo and Michael Pavkovic. They contended that the public's appetite for military history had created an 'overwhelming volume of publications' where the 'quality of this outpouring is inevitably uneven, and military history has not always enjoyed a high reputation in academic circles'.⁸

This criticism applies to New Zealand's POW literature, with many contributions written by former POWs who published memoirs or histories for the public. There has been a notable lack of academic analysis of the experiences of New Zealand POWs. The histories written generally fall into one of two categories. First, there are those that focus on gung-ho narratives of continuing the war effort from behind the wire through sabotage and escape. Second, many accounts merely publish interviews of POWs, leaving little room for original analysis.

When historians discussed the New Zealand POW experience, often it was in an unfavourable light. Historian Chris Pugsley noted that captured men 'lived with the guilt of having been taken prisoner, and with the restrictions and frustrations of prison life.'⁹ To counteract the assumed shame of captivity, histories tended to emphasise the POWs' resistance. In a 2006 work designed for the general public, entitled *Escape!: Kiwi POWs on the run in World War II*, author Matthew Wright showcased the daring escapes that New Zealand POWs attempted during the

⁸ Stephen Morillo with Michael F. Pavkovic, *What is Military History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), p. 2.

⁹ Chris Pugsley with Laurie Baber, Buddy Mikaere, Nigel Prickett and Rose Young, *Kiwis in Conflict: 200 Years of New Zealanders at War* (Auckland: David Bateman Ltd, 2008), p. 242.

war.¹⁰ Wright argued escape was a noble accomplishment and that to most officers it ‘was an automatic duty, both to their country and to themselves.’¹¹ He also extended the passion for escapes to enlisted men, noting that many regular soldiers saw ‘escape as their only option – a decision flavoured by sense of duty, patriotism, personal integrity, and loyalty to friends.’¹² Wright mentioned the constant adversities that POWs experienced, such as lack of supplies and isolation, and that these ‘hardships were compounded by idleness; boredom was the enemy of hope.’¹³ However, rather than examining these harsh conditions, Wright simply used them to argue why POWs were so keen to escape.

Wright also produced the study *Behind Enemy Lines: Kiwi Freedom Fighters in WWII*, which discussed the efforts of New Zealanders fighting with partisan forces.¹⁴ Again, the portrayal of POW escapes was glorified to the point where he argued:

Hopeful Kiwis jumped into the darkness from moving trains and trucks, leaped wires, absconded from the working parties. Once in their permanent camps they looked for every loophole. They joined tunnelling parties. They disguised themselves and walked out.

They swung, Tarzan-style, from ropes.¹⁵

The language that Wright used when writing about these escapes romanticised a very small part of the POW experience. Emphasising the heroic qualities of men who escaped had the converse effect of diminishing the experiences of POWs who did not try to escape. Wright’s suggestion that these men ‘simply resigned themselves to their fate’ and waited for the war to end was simplistic.¹⁶ Likewise, historian Ian McGibbon emphasised that most prisoners ‘settled down to make the best of their lot, but a small minority, not content to sit out the war in captivity,

¹⁰ Matthew Wright, *Escape!: Kiwi POWs on the run in World War II* (Auckland: Random House, 2006).

¹¹ Wright, *Escape!*, p. 14.

¹² Wright, *Escape!*, p. 14.

¹³ Wright, *Escape!*, p. 17.

¹⁴ *Behind Enemy Lines: Kiwi Freedom Fighters in WWII*, ed. by Matthew Wright (Auckland: Random House, 2010).

¹⁵ Wright, *Behind Enemy Lines*, p. 10.

¹⁶ Wright, *Escape!*, p. 13.

took often fleeting opportunities to escape from the transit camps or trains.’¹⁷ Escape attempts were a minor aspect of captivity, but they have been disproportionately represented in histories of the New Zealand POW experience. This thesis argues that the men’s struggle to endure their captivity is just as worthy of documentation as the experience of those who attempted daring escapes.

On the surface, literature scholar Susan Jacobs’ *Fighting with the Enemy: New Zealand POWs and the Italian Resistance* appeared to be another run-of-the-mill POW history that documented the adventures of escaped men.¹⁸ While she covered those events, Jacobs also provided insight into how difficult the years of captivity were for the men. She rejected the notion that POWs had an easier wartime experience than those on the front lines:

Often prisoners-of-war were thought to have ‘sat out’ the war or to have had a lesser time of it than those fighting with the Eighth Army in the Italian Campaign. But most had known bitter fighting, the humiliation of capture, the unnerving ennui of prison life, and for those who escaped, the heady mix of fear and excitement. The demands made on them were diverse, complex, and required survival skills necessary to any battlefield.¹⁹

Jacobs contended that when soldiers were taken prisoner they faced difficult questions about their identity, because capture ‘meant not only giving up one’s freedom, but being relieved of personal belongings that expressed individuality and a tenuous connection with one’s life before capture.’²⁰ She also argued that although acts of violent brutality were a part of camp life, ‘the real enemies were hunger and monotony.’²¹ Even though Jacobs discussed the pressures of captivity, escapees were still glamorised, with her noting that ‘prisoners who successfully

¹⁷ Ian McGibbon, *New Zealand and the Second World War: The People, the Battles and the Legacy* (Auckland: Hodder Moa Beckett, 2004), p. 74.

¹⁸ Susan Jacobs, *Fighting with the Enemy: New Zealand POWs and the Italian Resistance* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 2003).

¹⁹ Jacobs, p. 12.

²⁰ Jacobs, p. 18.

²¹ Jacobs, p. 26.

escaped were those who challenged military authority and had no compunction about disobeying orders. They possessed qualities of resourcefulness and bold initiative in judging the situation for themselves, and an unquenched antipathy to being imprisoned.’²² Again, this writing plays upon the perception that prisoners who escaped were superior to those who were unable to or who chose not to do so.

An important part of the New Zealand POW experience was the identity questions raised by the transition from soldier to captive. The theme of identity was explored by Canadian anthropologists Madeleine Mant and Nancy Lovell via an examination of various military commemorative sites.²³ Mant and Lovell contended that when people joined the military and conformed to the required structures, they gave up most of their ‘personal identity.’²⁴ Their new military identity comprised ‘three main factors: exclusivity (identity as the “other”); rank; and distinctions such as awards or medals of valour.’²⁵ Further identity complications arose when someone transitioned to a prisoner. Mant and Lovell argued that political prisoners who were interned in concentration camps were remembered in public memorials as homogenous, because it was too difficult to represent ‘the heterogeneous nature’ of a large group.²⁶ Australian historian Christina Twomey argued that POW identities were complicated further, because prisoners made ‘a symbolic journey from one gendered sphere to another, where the masculine world of action is left behind for the more culturally feminine site of containment.’²⁷ Whether or not captivity was feminine is debatable, but it is clear that New Zealand POWs were confronted by the transition from soldier to captive, with some viewing defeat as emasculating. This thesis examines these complex emotions, because the shame of defeat was one of the many pressures

²² Jacobs, pp. 46-47.

²³ Madeleine Mant and Nancy C. Lovell, ‘Individual and Group Identity in WWII Commemorative Sites’, *Mortality*, 17 (2012), 18-35.

²⁴ Mant and Lovell, p. 19.

²⁵ Mant and Lovell, p. 20.

²⁶ Mant and Lovell, p. 30.

²⁷ Christina Twomey, ‘Emaciation or Emasculation’, pp. 299-300.

that prisoners endured in captivity. Exploring these emotions makes apparent the men's need to mentally escape their situation.

Narratives and Themes: Rejection of Escape

Many histories of the POW experience have placed it within a familiar narrative of continuing the war effort behind the wire through escape and sabotage. However, in addition to the accounts mentioned above, there has been a growing trend to establish a more balanced and nuanced perspective to our understanding of day-to-day life as a POW. The POW experience is increasingly being analysed in regards to broad scholarly themes such as identity, memory construction and economics. British military historian Adrian Gilbert's *POW: Allied Prisoners in Europe 1939-1945* was particularly noteworthy.²⁸ Gilbert thoroughly rejected the notion that life behind the wire was a game played by overly-eager POWs, who constantly sought opportunities to escape. He argued that although there were certainly instances of escape,

captivity was still a wretched business. The gung-ho escape narratives that came to define prison life in the post-war years give a false gloss to the drab realities of existence behind barbed wire: poor living conditions, chronic – sometimes acute – hunger, deadening monotony, and the misery of being beholden to the will of the enemy with no release date in sight.²⁹

Rather than being weighed down by tales that might excite potential readers, such as those dominated by escapes and danger, Gilbert sought to show that out of the POW experience 'there were positive aspects that sprang from the prisoners' own determination to make the most out of their otherwise poor lot.'³⁰ Eloquently, he argued that:

²⁸ Adrian Gilbert, *POW: Allied Prisoners in Europe 1939-1945* (London: John Murray Publishers, 2006).

²⁹ Gilbert, p. xi.

³⁰ Gilbert, p. xii.

Scattered like islands across Greater Germany and Italy, POW camps were small havens of civilization and democracy within a totalitarian sea. In most camps men were elected by ballot to positions of authority and responsibility; free speech was taken for granted; books prohibited beyond the wire were read by those within, and for the first time in years the music of a banned composer like Mendelssohn could be heard in Germany. Prisoners of war displayed an inspirational fortitude in enduring – and sometimes overcoming – their circumstances.³¹

Gilbert's statement noted how distractions, like music and books, provided enclaves where prisoners partly escaped the pressures of captivity.

Another important effort to change our perception of the POW experience was undertaken by historian Simon MacKenzie in *The Colditz Myth: British and Commonwealth Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany*.³² Mackenzie argued that our understanding of the POW experience has been negatively affected by the dominance of escape narratives and the portrayal of camp life in television series such as *Colditz*. He sought to make the reader more aware of the POW experience by exploring 'the extent to which the reality differed from the image in connection with the British prisoner-of-war experience in general and within the walls of Colditz itself.'³³ Through his analysis, MacKenzie argued that by emphasising tales of escape, 'less exciting aspects of the POW experience have been underplayed or ignored.'³⁴ He further rejected the proliferation of escape narratives, contending that 'Privation, boredom, uncertainty, occasional danger, and much else besides made POW life for most men resemble an endurance test rather than a light-hearted game.'³⁵

³¹ Gilbert, p. xii.

³² S.P. MacKenzie, *The Colditz Myth: British and Commonwealth Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

³³ MacKenzie, p. v.

³⁴ MacKenzie, p. 2.

³⁵ MacKenzie, p. 2.

While the media construction of the POW experience in the immediate aftermath of World War Two was romanticised, it is important to understand why the public was attracted to these portrayals. Military historian Paul Springer argued that the ‘public has an almost insatiable demand for military history, but only military history of a certain glamorous, heroic flavour.’³⁶ Springer explained that POW films were well received by the public, because themes such as resistance and escape, similar to those in prison movies, could be portrayed ‘without the problem of a criminal background hindering sympathy for the hero.’³⁷ Perhaps more important than the entertainment that these films provided, they also reinforced what it meant to be English. Historian Nicholas Cull stated, ‘If Englishness was about things like improvisation, resistance, strength of character or individualism, how better to show this than through the POW stories, which seemed to give expression to these qualities.’³⁸ Cull went further, noting that in Britain the POW genre became an escape from the reality of its ‘post-war impotence’ and became a product to celebrate that ‘World War Two was won by all classes in Britain.’³⁹ This point became a key feature of Britain’s wartime memory, because if POW films were set ‘early in the war or in an RAF only camp and there is no need to discuss the American presence at all.’⁴⁰

MacKenzie’s work was acknowledged by military geologist and historian Peter Doyle in *Prisoners of War in Germany*, with Doyle noting that our understanding of the POW experience had been influenced by ‘the “Colditz Myth” – the prevalence of escape stories in books and films.’⁴¹ He went on to say that:

For a generation brought up on films such as *The Great Escape*, *The Colditz Story*, and *The Wooden Horse*, the perception of kriegie life is one of enforced idleness, incarcerated behind barbed wire fences, ever looking for an opportunity to escape. Although

³⁶ Paul J. Springer, ‘Prisoners of War on Film and in Memory’, *Orbis*, 54 (2010), p. 669.

³⁷ Springer, p. 669.

³⁸ Nicholas J. Cull, ““Great Escapes”: ‘Englishness’ and the Prisoner of War Genre’, *Film History*, 14 (2002), pp. 287-88.

³⁹ Cull, p. 288.

⁴⁰ Cull, p. 288.

⁴¹ Peter Doyle, *Prisoners of War in Germany* (Oxford: Shire Publications Ltd, 2008), p. 5.

often stated that ‘it was the prisoner’s duty to escape’ – now embedded in POW mythology – the reality was somewhat different.⁴²

The idea that it was the POWs’ duty to escape is prevalent throughout New Zealand POW literature. It manifests itself when honouring the men who attempted or were successful in glamorised escapes, or those who evaded the enemy and fought with partisan forces. Doyle’s rebuffing of this myth was important, with him noting that for ‘most men in the stalags, obliged to work six days out of seven on a diet that barely kept them life and limb together, escape was hardly a practical proposition.’⁴³ This thesis takes a similar stance as it explores the accounts of New Zealand POWs, seeking to reveal the more intimate details of the POW experience, how they lived day-to-day, their emotions and their endurance.

The rejection of widespread escape narratives was the inspiration behind *The Barbed-Wire University: The Real Lives of Allied Prisoners of War in the Second World War* by British journalist Midge Gillies.⁴⁴ She argued that their tales have already ‘been told in countless ways – from the slew of first-hand accounts that emerged in the decade after the war to the more recent and distant stories written by survivors.’⁴⁵ These tales of escape, Gillies contended, were ‘far removed from the quiet desperation experienced by men like my father.’⁴⁶ She intended to shed new light on the POW experience by highlighting the ‘more mundane courage of keeping going through the day-to-day boredom and uncertainty of life as a POW.’⁴⁷ Gillies was drawn to the topic not only because she wanted to better understand her father’s experience, but also to express her admiration for those men who, rather than escape, ‘stole back time from their captors through creativity.’⁴⁸ Similarly, this thesis rejects the portrayal of the POW experience as a

⁴² Doyle, p. 53.

⁴³ Doyle, p. 53.

⁴⁴ Midge Gillies, *The Barbed-Wire University: The Real Lives of Allied Prisoners of War in the Second World War* (London: Aurum Press Limited, 2011).

⁴⁵ Gillies, p. xvi.

⁴⁶ Gillies, p. xvii.

⁴⁷ Gillies, p. xvi.

⁴⁸ Gillies, p. xvi.

series of escape attempts; instead, it reveals the coping mechanisms prisoners used to mentally retreat from the monotony of captivity.

Australian Scholarly Responses to the POW Narrative

Australian historians have undertaken an on-going re-examination of the POW experience that embraces the ordeals of these men as an important perspective in their country's World War Two narrative. Twomey argued that the approach to POWs changed in the 1980s when developments in psychiatry helped legitimise narratives of trauma which 'recast former POWs in a sympathetic light as the traumatised survivors of an earlier war.'⁴⁹ This development resulted in a memory boom which saw an 'extraordinary rise in eyewitness accounts of the POW experience, from television and radio documentaries to an ever-increasing number of personal memoirs and newspaper feature articles on individual survivors.'⁵⁰ Australian Brigadier General Roger Noble noted that in the following years, an increase in events and ceremonies related to POWs saw the experience incorporated into 'the rhetoric and discussion of Australian identity.'⁵¹

The initially reserved reaction to the POW experience could be attributed to the complex need to incorporate it into the Anzac myth. In 2011, Australian historian Peter Monteath argued that experiences of POWs had been neglected, because the development of the Anzac myth 'had been built around the figure of the warrior hero, an imposing physical figure of resolute mind, who had triumphed in combat.'⁵² But this description quickly became antiquated as our understanding

broadened to encompass other qualities too, qualities which might manifest themselves beyond the field of battle as well as on it. ...

Above all, perhaps, there emerged an understanding of mateship

⁴⁹ Christina Twomey, 'Prisoners of War of the Japanese: War and Memory in Australia', *Memory Studies*, 6 (2013), p. 323.

⁵⁰ Twomey, 'War and Memory in Australia', p. 323.

⁵¹ Roger Noble, 'The Australian Prisoner of War Experience and National Identity', *Australian Defence Force Journal* (2005), p. 28.

⁵² Peter Monteath, *P.O.W.: Australian Prisoners of War in Hitler's Reich* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 2011), p. 430.

which embraced not just altruism under fire but compassionate action outside of the battle as well.⁵³

Twomey went further when describing why the POW experience was initially neglected by the Australian public. She argued that although there were similarities between the Anzac myth and the POW experience, these shared characteristics were obscured when mixed with the public's uncertainty as to how to react to 'defeated soldiers' who were 'incarcerated by an enemy long constructed as racially inferior to them.'⁵⁴

This idea of racial tension and identity construction is an important aspect of World War Two and POW literature, especially when considering that the conflict resulted in multiple culture clashes. Twomey noted that, 'Defeat, emasculation and shattered pride of the White race made commemoration of the war experiences of POWs in the 1940s and 1950s a difficult task and one that the state, at least, refused to countenance.'⁵⁵ With this in mind, Noble argued that the evolution of the POW experience as a subset of the Anzac myth 'reveals a long struggle by former prisoners for recognition as a legitimate, independent group within the broader Anzac mythology.'⁵⁶

The Australian response is relevant to this thesis, because the difficulty in understanding the POW experience is also prevalent in New Zealand. Historian David McGill argued that New Zealand's war histories have tended to 'reflect some macho side of the national character which glorifies the fighting man and puts down the supposed losers', in this case, the POWs were deemed to be the losers.⁵⁷ Similar to the growing trend in Australia, the notion of shame and guilt over being a POW has been questioned. Building on these ideas, this thesis further demystifies the New Zealand POW experience by analysing the surprising amount

⁵³ Monteath, *P.O.W.: Australian Prisoners of War in Hitler's Reich*, p. 430.

⁵⁴ Twomey, 'War and Memory in Australia', p. 322.

⁵⁵ Twomey, 'War and Memory in Australia', p. 322.

⁵⁶ Noble, pp. 27-28.

⁵⁷ McGill, p. 205.

of agency that the men exhibited; in doing so, it highlights their ability to construct spaces where they coped with the isolation and deprivation of captivity.

In *Prisoners of the Japanese: Literary Imagination and the Prisoner-of-War Experience*, historian Roger Bourke argued that in Australia the POW story ‘quickly became, and still remains, not only an important part of the nation’s wartime experience itself, but also an object of national pride.’⁵⁸ Bourke examined the POW experience through the lens of how POWs were represented by fictional tales. Notably, he argued that POWs ‘went to extraordinary lengths in their attempts to re-create, like Robinson Crusoe, a makeshift, improvised version of their previous, civilised existence.’⁵⁹ Bourke also contended that *The Bridge over the River Kwai* was perhaps the most dominant literary imagination of the POW experience, but that it was ‘shaped by intellectual, artistic, commercial, and political concerns totally unrelated to the actual historical events upon which it is based.’⁶⁰

Similar to Bourke’s study of the literary imaginings of the POW experience, Twomey explored the enduring impact of POW imagery that influences our memory of their ordeal. Most photographs that were readily available after the war made apparent the suffering that Australian POWs had endured, with Twomey noting that the ‘returning POWs were the emaciated antithesis of the sturdy Anzacs that had beckoned from the recruitment posters throughout the war.’⁶¹ Similarly, historian Stephen Garton argued that, ‘In 1945, prisoners of war were a disturbing symbol – emaciated, prone, afflicted with wasting diseases, tropical fevers and weeping sores. The publication of photographs and drawings of the prisoners when first liberated created an indelible image of wasted manhood.’⁶² The confronting nature of these photos created an awkward question

⁵⁸ Roger Bourke, *Prisoners of the Japanese: Literary Imagination and the Prisoner-of-War Experience* (Australia: University of Queensland Press, 2006), pp. 125-26.

⁵⁹ Bourke, p. 29.

⁶⁰ Bourke, p. 6.

⁶¹ Twomey, ‘Emaciation or Emasculation’, p. 300.

⁶² Stephen Garton, “‘Fit only for the Scrap Heap’: Rebuilding Returned Soldier Manhood in Australia after 1945’, *Gender & History*, 20, 1 (2008), p. 52.

as to how to represent these men, which many writers overcame by grasping to 'the theme of moral victory and national pride and rewrote defeat as a victory for courage.'⁶³ Twomey argued that although the images of emaciated POWs conflicted with the 'male warrior ideal', they connected with the 'Christian masculinity that presents these men as those who have suffered so that others may live.'⁶⁴ She concluded that 'the capacity of the image to at once express emasculation and present bodily suffering as redemptive for the nation may hold the key to its continuing power.'⁶⁵

Although limited to literary constructions of the POW experience, Bourke's work was a seminal account in improving our understanding of how POWs have been and should be viewed. He argued that the best accounts were from those who were there. However, these voices have been biased toward those who had better access to writing facilities, such as officers or journalists. It was only after many years that the 'less-privileged voices, those of the ordinary soldiers, the military nurses, the women civilians and, eventually, the children, were to be heard'.⁶⁶ Bourke eloquently stated that by accepting the broad range of accounts, the POW experience could be understood with more nuance, because it was

not simply the story of defeated soldiers toiling on the Burma-Thailand railway; it is a complex web of individual tales told from multiple points of view and at distances in time ranging from a week to more than half-a-century.⁶⁷

Like Bourke, this thesis recognises the prisoner's personal outlook on events. Through a detailed examination of the men's accounts, the study shows how individuals coped with captivity. However, it is impossible to fully comprehend the POW experience, because some accounts are lost to time. Those men who were overwhelmed by the physical and mental pressures of captivity were

⁶³ Twomey, 'Emaciation or Emasculation', pp. 300-01.

⁶⁴ Twomey, 'Emaciation or Emasculation', p. 306.

⁶⁵ Twomey, 'Emaciation or Emasculation', p. 308.

⁶⁶ Bourke, p. 13.

⁶⁷ Bourke, pp. 13-14.

unlikely to have kept diaries or been willing to revisit those painful memories. Moreover, prisoners died in captivity, leaving their ordeal undocumented.

Because of the atrocious conditions that Australian POWs in the Pacific suffered, many of the historical accounts about this period focus on these hardships. However, in *Defying the Odds: Surviving Sandakan and Kuching*, historian Michele Cunningham rejected this emphasis on the violence and brutality.⁶⁸ Cunningham argued that rather than the accounts of violent brutality that have dominated histories, the POW experience was better represented as ‘one of a prolonged struggle for survival with continually decreasing food supplies and increasing debility.’⁶⁹ Additionally, she contended that time in captivity was a ‘story of relationships among a large group of men in crowded conditions, striving to better themselves and with a quiet confidence that they would survive.’⁷⁰

Discussing Cunningham’s work, historian Hank Nelson praised her ability to take ‘the reader through a range of camps ... where the prisoners confronted sustained deprivation rather than immediate and violent death or sadistic guards in exhausting work camps.’⁷¹ Furthermore, Nelson contended that Cunningham’s rejection of the brutality narrative ‘has broadened our understanding of the camps where the constants were hunger, confinement and a sentence without a known end.’⁷²

Cunningham sought to improve our understanding of the techniques these Australian POWs used to survive their ordeals. In doing so, she highlighted the recreational and educational pursuits that were often overlooked in favour of more gung-ho romantic stories of escape and evasion. Cunningham noted that at

⁶⁸ Michele Cunningham, *Defying the Odds: Surviving Sandakan and Kuching* (Sydney: Hachette Australia, 2007).

⁶⁹ Cunningham, p. xvi.

⁷⁰ Cunningham, p. xvi.

⁷¹ Cunningham, p. viii.

⁷² Cunningham, p. viii.

Kuching, a Japanese POW camp on the island of Borneo, ‘an education committee guided what was an incredible experiment in adult education.’⁷³ Throughout her research, Cunningham contended that the ‘amazing range of talent that was unearthed during their two years in Kuching is a major focus of this book.’⁷⁴ This thesis draws inspiration from her appreciation of the recreational activities that POWs engaged in, rather than the previously dominant narratives of escape and brutality. The conscious and unconscious decisions to recreate elements of their previous home lives underpin this study’s exploration of how POWs constructed the spaces they occupied during their captivity. These efforts showed how prisoners mentally escaped their captivity.

Historian Frances De Groen compared the POW experience to Australian convict narratives, and concluded that it was possible to ‘enrich the dialogue about the Pacific War captivity narrative by reading it as “prison” literature rather than a branch of “war” writing.’⁷⁵ De Groen praised the increased academic interest in the POW experience, because it created an opportunity for historians to shape ‘a dissonant sub-genre of Australian war writing’s dominant “big-noting” Anzac tradition.’⁷⁶ Still, she contended that ‘the Australian prisoner-of-war narrative from the Pacific War, in both documentary and imaginative forms, has generated little critical attention.’⁷⁷

De Groen’s attempt to place the POW experience into a wider narrative by comparing their accounts with those of Australian convicts was noteworthy in the expansion of critical thinking about POWs. By examining the different sources, she came to the conclusion that both

groups developed comparable strategies for coping with the horror of their situation including black marketeering, secret codes, a

⁷³ Cunningham, p. 6.

⁷⁴ Cunningham, p. 6.

⁷⁵ Frances De Groen, ‘Convicts, Coolies and Colonialism: reorienting the prisoner-of-war narrative’, *Australian Literary Studies in the 21st Century* (2000), p. 86.

⁷⁶ De Groen, p. 86.

⁷⁷ De Groen, p. 86.

sardonic, subversive humour, a vivid prison ‘argot’, supportive ‘mateship’ networks and a larrikin toughness.⁷⁸

Although these comparisons are strictly Australian, the survival strategies employed by these men were used by New Zealand POWs, as well. This study examines accounts from New Zealand POWs to explore how these techniques helped shape the spaces they inhabited during their imprisonment.

The Australian re-examination of the POW experience was not exclusive to the accounts of those in the Pacific. In *P.O.W. Australian Prisoners of War in Hitler’s Reich*, Monteath explored the narratives of POWs in Europe. In a similar vein to Cunningham and Bourke, Monteath argued that ‘history books typically consign POWs to their footnotes.’⁷⁹ He acknowledged that

the 8400 or so who returned from German captivity ... had had it easier. They did not lament the same horrific death tally among their number as the prisoners of the Japanese did; their bodies were not marked by the ravages of war as visibly as the bodies of the men captured, used and abused by the Japanese were.⁸⁰

But Monteath lamented that the need to compare the suffering of Pacific and European POWs had placed the latter on the periphery of Australian history, because there were

remarkable stories to tell of life and death in Hitler’s Reich – stories of the pain, the fear, the boredom, the privation, the adventure and the frustration of life as a POW. What they missed was an audience to listen to them and, in time, they lost as well the inclination to tell their stories.⁸¹

⁷⁸ De Groen, p. 89.

⁷⁹ Monteath, *P.O.W.: Australian Prisoners of War in Hitler’s Reich*, p. 1.

⁸⁰ Monteath, *P.O.W.: Australian Prisoners of War in Hitler’s Reich*, p. 9.

⁸¹ Monteath, *P.O.W.: Australian Prisoners of War in Hitler’s Reich*, p. 9.

Similar to this thesis, Monteath argued that an analysis of daily camp life would reveal a deeper narrative of the POW experience than those dominated by escapes and brutality.

There has been a significant effort to record oral histories with Australian POWs, and these interviews formed the basis of film producer Michael Caulfield's book *War Behind the Wire: Australian Prisoners of War*.⁸² Rather than analysing the sources in depth, Caulfield stated that he 'linked their stories with brief, historical notes, an occasional comment, and, here and there, undisguised admiration and wonder.'⁸³ Importantly, he sought to explain that:

No prisoner's story is the same as another, yet clear themes emerged from these interviews and that is the way this book has been arranged. They all talk about the day they were captured, or the constant, desperate longing for food ... and freedom. They all remember their day of liberation, and the heartbreaking difficulty of coming back to life and love.⁸⁴

Caulfield did a remarkable job of expressing complex themes such as race, economics, boredom and isolation in the POWs' own voices. To be sure, he could have further analysed these topics, but his study works well as an introduction to the pressures of the POW experience. This thesis draws inspiration from his work by exploring the accounts of New Zealand POWs, but it adds nuance by explaining how certain themes, such as those expressed by Caulfield, shaped the POW experience.

United States of America Historiographies

As the above discussion emphasises, scholars have made considerable effort to understand captivity narratives. Crucial to our understanding of these histories is

⁸² *War Behind the Wire: Australian Prisoners of War*, ed. by Michael Caulfield (Sydney: Hachette Australia, 2008).

⁸³ Caulfield, p. x.

⁸⁴ Caulfield, p. x.

the work devoted to American perspectives. The POW experience has garnered significant interest from both the American public and its academic community. In an article, political scientist Dominic Tierney examined the United States' obsession with prisoners throughout history.⁸⁵ Tierney argued that Americans were intrigued by the POW experience, because it involved men and women who had 'lost what Americans cherish most, their freedom, and in many cases it was in service to their country.'⁸⁶ He contended that, in most cases,

the captive is idealized, and the captor is demonized, the distinction between Americans and their adversary grows even starker. Americans see their core values and identity highlighted against the dark backdrop of an alien and cruel enemy.⁸⁷

The idealisation of the captive and demonisation of the captor often bring examinations of racial and cultural differences to the fore. These differences are especially prevalent when examining the histories of American POWs interned by the Japanese during World War Two.

In *Prisoners of the Japanese in World War II*, Van Waterford argued that the brutal treatment of Allied POWs by their Japanese captors was flavoured by the 'desire to take revenge on individuals for the white race's galling pretensions to superiority over the colored.'⁸⁸ Additionally, Waterford contended that the imprisonment of Japanese-Americans in the United States was the cause of much friction between the two countries and was a contributing factor to the poor treatment of American POWs in Japanese captivity.⁸⁹ Similar to other studies, Waterford argued that 'POWs in the Pacific theatre of World War II faced much harsher conditions in the camps than did their counterparts in Europe.'⁹⁰ He noted

⁸⁵ Dominic Tierney, 'Prisoner Dilemmas: The American Obsession with POWs and Hostages', *Orbis*, 54 (2010), pp. 130-45.

⁸⁶ Tierney, p. 134.

⁸⁷ Tierney, p. 136.

⁸⁸ Van Waterford, *Prisoner of the Japanese in World War II* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company Inc., 1994), p. 39.

⁸⁹ Waterford, p. 25.

⁹⁰ Waterford, p. 178.

that the lengths of their sentences were far greater, with the average incarceration of a Pacific POW being 1,148 days, compared to 347 days in Europe.⁹¹

The racial tension between American POWs and their Japanese captors was the central theme of Australian historian Gavan Daws' study *Prisoners of the Japanese: POWs of World War II in the Pacific*.⁹² Daws was critical of the brutal treatment that Allied POWs experienced while imprisoned in the Pacific and sought to understand their ordeal. In doing so, he argued that the POW experience was dominated by tribalism, noting that POWs organised themselves into tribes and sub-tribes, based on their nationality, branch of service and regiment.⁹³ Racial tension formed a common bond between prisoners, because 'the Japanese appeared to their prisoners as the ultimate alien tribe, grotesque, brutal, incomprehensible, barely human, in fact non-human.'⁹⁴ The unfamiliar environment and intercultural connections posed serious questions to the POWs' individual and collective identities. Daws contended that, for a white prisoner in Asia, 'His skin was a prison uniform he could never take off.'⁹⁵ The descriptions of POWs' collective identities were often stereotypical; racial and cultural differences were used by POWs to reinforce their own national identities, with Daws explaining that:

The Americans were the great individualists of the camps, the capitalists, the cowboys, the gangsters. The British hung on to their class structure like bulldogs, for grim death. The Australians kept trying to construct little male-bonded welfare states.⁹⁶

Many prisoners had not encountered foreigners before, and these stereotypes helped them comprehend the strangeness of their situation. While not everyone

⁹¹ Waterford, p. 178.

⁹² Gavan Daws, *Prisoners of the Japanese: POWs of World War II in the Pacific* (Carlton North: Scribe Publications, 2004).

⁹³ Daws, p. 135.

⁹⁴ Daws, p. 24.

⁹⁵ Daws, p. 100.

⁹⁶ Daws, p. 23.

fitted within these categories, expected behaviours and characteristics gave men an identity with which they could affiliate.

Similarly, this thesis contends that the New Zealand POW identity was impacted by the remoteness that many of those men faced on a daily basis. For most, it was the first time they had left their homeland, and now they were imprisoned in a foreign environment on the other side of the world. It is hard to comprehend the loneliness that New Zealand POWs experienced throughout their captivity, and it is worth investigating how their individual and collective identities were shaped by the spaces they inhabited. In the early days of their imprisonment, the men's identities were likely to be more rigidly based on their military, national and cultural differences. However, after years of daily encounters with foreign captors and captives, cultural lines blurred, as men from all walks of life despaired for the conflict to end so they could return to their pre-war lives.

American military historian Gregory Urwin explored the themes of group identity and internal structure.⁹⁷ Urwin examined the experiences of the defenders of Wake Island, with a strong emphasis on the role that the unit's cohesion played in allowing them to survive their ordeal of captivity by the Japanese. He argued that the Japanese usually broke up units, but with a 'stroke of luck, the majority of the Wake Islanders enjoyed the rare privilege of beginning their captivity as part of a single, unified group.'⁹⁸ Once the group arrived at Woosung prison camp, the prisoners 'had all the time in the world to brood and feel miserable.'⁹⁹ It was the introduction of military routine into the camp that

transformed the mood of the men incarcerated at Woosung. The Wake Islanders began to joke again. The barracks rang with songs of laughter. Instead of dwelling on the cold or lack of food, the Americans refought the battle of Wake. As they exchanged stories

⁹⁷ Gregory John William Urwin, 'The Defenders of Wake Island: Their Two Wars, 1941-1945' (Doctoral thesis, University of Notre Dame, 1983).

⁹⁸ Urwin, p. 453.

⁹⁹ Urwin, p. 290.

of their exploits, they realized they were not dishonourable weaklings as the Japanese claimed.¹⁰⁰

The rediscovery of their identity as soldiers helped to comfort the men through their ordeal by reinforcing support networks which became crucial to everyday survival.¹⁰¹ The theme of reclaiming and reinforcing identity while in captivity is central to this thesis' exploration of the New Zealand POW experience and how camp environments were reshaped by the implementation of various elements of home life. These small reminders of their previous lives helped the men reclaim some of their former identities, while they dealt with issues of identity concerning their masculinity, remoteness and cultural differences.

Methodology

A continuing theme throughout this introduction so far, and for the thesis itself, is how scholars perceive and construct the past, in this case the POW experience. It is important to understand these men on their terms. That does not mean we have to feel first-hand the brutal conditions they endured. We cannot, but we can sympathise with them. In terms of theories about remembering conflict, this study draws influence from author and former soldier Samuel Hynes' *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War*.¹⁰² Hynes argued that war histories were often weighed down by numbers, which left readers without an accurate understanding of how individuals were affected by their war experience. However, he stated

we can and do respond to one man in his war. And so if we would understand what war is like, and how it *feels*, we must turn away from history and its numbers, and seek the reality in the personal witness of the men who were there.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Urwin, p. 296.

¹⁰¹ Urwin, p. 292.

¹⁰² Samuel Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War* (London: Pimlico, 1998).

¹⁰³ Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale*, p. xii.

This study agrees with Hynes' statement that the human element has been lost in most recorded histories of World War Two. Most especially, it seeks to re-interpret the New Zealand POW experience by exploring the individual accounts of those who were there.

Historian Paul Fussell has also re-evaluated how conflicts were remembered, notably how people tried to comprehend the inconceivable and deal with trauma. Fussell argued that the press portrayed the First World War by using phrasing, such as the 'race to ...', to describe military advancements, because:

Rehabilitated and applied to these new events, the phrase had the advantage of a familiar sportsmanlike, Explorer Club overtone, suggesting that what was happening was not too far distant from playing games, running races, and competing in a thoroughly decent way.¹⁰⁴

This writing was similar to how POWs documented their captivity, especially escape attempts. These activities were referred to as games or sports. Prisoners often emphasised the exhilaration of outwitting the guards, while neglecting the possibility or severity of punishment.

This study is the culmination of a major archival research project which involved the collection and analysis of diaries, letters, memoirs, oral histories and images, from the Kippenberger Military Archive, the Alexander Turnbull Library, the Waikato Museum and the Auckland War Memorial Museum. It is essential to fully understand the positives and negatives that each account comprises, and these concerns need to be constantly considered when examining them. As previously mentioned, because of the vast number of New Zealanders who became POWs during World War Two, this study is unable to cover all of their experiences. Some men did not document their ordeal, while others wrote accounts which were either illegible, damaged or lost. Thus, the availability of

¹⁰⁴ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 9.

sources limits the experiences which can be examined. In general, most of the men who feature in this study faced a similar ordeal. They were captured early in the war, either at Crete or North Africa, and were interned in Italian camps until they were eventually moved to German camps. Later, in most cases, they were forced to march westwards across Europe as the war came to a close. These accounts form the basis of this thesis. And while many accounts were similar, the thesis emphasises captivity as a personal experience where no two experiences were exactly the same.

The “truth” that can be obtained via these primary sources is a topic of debate in academic literature. Historian Carl Becker claimed, ‘For all practical purposes history is, for us and for the time being, what we know it to be.’¹⁰⁵ Becker went on to describe how although certain historical facts are known to us, much of the history surrounding events is lost. Philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt agreed that historical events are only partially visible, with the gaps in the story having to be added to with ‘intuition, inference, and guesswork.’¹⁰⁶ The idea that knowledge is ever changing and open to new interpretations is central to this thesis, thereby allowing for a fresh examination of the experiences of New Zealand POWs during World War Two. The study appreciates the effort that previous authors have made, while acknowledging that the current availability of resources and ever-evolving historical theories make it possible to shed new light on a previously explored subject and to discover new information.

It is important to note that although this study explores the POW experience, it can never re-create the suffocating physical and mental conditions that captives had to face on a daily basis. Additionally, it is restricted by the sources it uses. For the most part, the experiences reflected in this thesis were from survivors. Without first-hand accounts, the true horrors faced by those unfortunate men who died during their captivity cannot be accurately examined. Therefore, we are left with a

¹⁰⁵ Carl Becker, ‘Everyman His Own Historian’, in *The Modern Historiography Reader*, ed. by Adam Budd (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), p. 20.

¹⁰⁶ Wilhelm von Humboldt, ‘On the Historian’s Task’, in *The Modern Historiography Reader*, ed. by Adam Budd (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), p. 167.

narrative that, although filled with uncertainty, sorrow and hardship, ultimately had a happy ending. This limitation is amplified as the study does not investigate the long-term struggles that POWs faced after returning home; that is a project for another time.

Since diaries are created at the time of the event, historians generally consider them to be authentic accounts. Historian Steve Stowe argued that diaries are among ‘the most democratic of historical sources’, because they are more candid than official documents, and ‘although only literate people kept diaries and exchanged letters, both forms were important to a wide variety of people in the past – rich and not-so-rich, old and young, women and men.’¹⁰⁷ In regards to war diaries, Hynes argued that they

have the virtues of immediacy and directness, and tend to level war experience, reporting the ordinary days with the extraordinary ones, the boredom as well as the excitement, and giving to their stories the close texture, the grain of life in war.¹⁰⁸

This point is important to the POW experience, because diaries document the boredom that POWs faced on a daily basis, whereas accounts produced after the event may focus on a select number of occurrences that stood out.

Regardless of their ability to inform us about the intricate details of daily life, like all historical sources, diaries still need to be critically analysed and approached with caution. One way to improve their reliability is to use them in combination with various other sources, which creates a more sophisticated portrayal of the past. This approach is necessary, because although diaries provide historians with an insight into the inner thoughts and feelings of historical actors, they do have limitations. Historian William McDowell argued that it is important to determine

¹⁰⁷ Steven Stowe, ‘Making Sense of Letters and Diaries’, from the *Making Sense of History Series, History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web*, <<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse>> [accessed 21 April 2015], p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Hynes, *The Soldiers’ Tale*, p. xiv.

for what purpose the diary was written, because ‘Some writers regard a diary as a private record of past events, whereas others view it as a useful means of storing information which can subsequently be used in writing an autobiography.’¹⁰⁹ McDowell highlighted this problem with his belief that, ‘Diaries often contain hearsay evidence and may have been written to justify particular actions or perhaps exaggerate the writer’s involvement in the events he or she describes.’¹¹⁰ Another weakness that affects the reliability of diaries is the passage of time between entries, with McDowell contending that a diary that was not kept daily is considerably less useful than one that was, in large part because events may be distorted by memory lapses.¹¹¹ Stowe agreed that diaries suffer from limitations, arguing that although on first appearance they appear to be individual and private, ‘on closer look, almost any individual diary or letter resembles others from the same time and place.’¹¹² Another limitation identified by Stowe was the accessibility of the original source. When the original manuscript is available to scholars, it is reasonable to assume that the document is in its original state. However, when reproduced or published, it is common for either family members or editors to ‘make judgments about readability or relevance which lead them to change the original text.’¹¹³

When examining letters, historian Katie Barclay cautioned that it was necessary to understand that these sources were ‘shaped by the context in which the letter is written, the genre rules that inform writing in that context, as well as the writer’s relationship with the reader.’¹¹⁴ In terms of letters from captivity, not only did most prisoners write to their mothers to seek comfort from a familiar support structure, but also they tried to alleviate concerns about their wellbeing by continually referencing that they were doing well. Historian Michael Roper

¹⁰⁹ W.H. McDowell, *Historical Research: A Guide for Writers of Dissertations, Theses, Articles and Books* (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 58.

¹¹⁰ McDowell, p. 58.

¹¹¹ McDowell, p. 58.

¹¹² Stowe, p. 1.

¹¹³ Stowe, p. 5.

¹¹⁴ Katie Barclay, ‘Negotiating Independence: Manliness and Begging Letters in Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Scotland’, in *Nine Centuries of Man: Manhood and Masculinity in Scottish History*, ed. by Lynn Abrams and Elizabeth L. Ewan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), p. 146.

examined the letters from men on the Western Front of World War One, with an emphasis on the mother-son relationship. Roper argued that, 'Men expected their mothers to continue satisfying their basic needs, and regarded such provision as proof of maternal devotion.'¹¹⁵ He also noted that the men's delight when receiving mail and despair when they went through long periods of isolation complicated the image of manly independence.¹¹⁶ Prisoners had similar reactions to the arrival or delay of mail. In their camps they were isolated from their non-military support networks and a letter could act as a physical reminder of home. However, the unpredictability of mail deliveries left many men to wonder if they had been forgotten.

Another resource that this study uses to explore the POW experience is memoirs, both published and unpublished. Although similar to diaries, they provide a more reflective account of the past. McDowell was critical of the relevance that these sources have to historical studies, because he argued events represented in memoirs were often 'viewed from a single perspective; they are normally written long after the events they describe; they are written for posterity and usually intended to impress a wider audience.'¹¹⁷ Although he was cautious of memoirs, McDowell suggested they were useful, as long as they were approached carefully by an historian who was able to read between the lines and consider not only what was being revealed, but also what was omitted.¹¹⁸ Fussell held a similar suspicion of memoirs, noting that, 'The further personal written materials move from the form of the daily diary, the closer they approach to the figurative and the fictional.'¹¹⁹ However, he acknowledged that memoirs were useful in overcoming the uniformity of World War Two.¹²⁰ Life writing allowed individuals to interpret and express their experience.

¹¹⁵ Michael Roper, 'Slipping out of View: Subjectivity and Emotion in Gender History', *History Workshop Journal*, 59 (Spring, 2005), p. 64.

¹¹⁶ Roper, p. 64.

¹¹⁷ McDowell, p. 58.

¹¹⁸ McDowell, p. 59.

¹¹⁹ Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 310.

¹²⁰ Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 70.

Memoirs are crucial to the study of the POW experience largely because of the wide-ranging camp conditions that POWs faced during their imprisonment. In some instances, men were able to write freely, without fear of repercussions. But in other circumstances, POWs had to self-censor their entries, thereby limiting the descriptions of their experience. Additionally, some POWs lacked the equipment to make diary writing part of their regular routine, and others simply did not see the purpose of documenting their monotonous existence. Although memoirs suffer from selectivity, they gave these men the opportunity to reflect on their POW experience, thereby allowing a sophisticated and rounded portrayal of their ordeal.

Beyond selectivity, some scholars considered the external forces that could influence the construction of memoirs. Historian Alastair Thomson noted that ‘Narrators are alert to what an audience wants to read or hear, and they seek recognition and affirmation of the self that is represented in the story.’¹²¹ In terms of war memoirs, he contended that these sources ‘must be considered as a complex construction of experience, shaped by a range of factors and forces.’¹²² These forces included reading other stories, which could influence how the men framed their own story.¹²³ Similarly, historian Frances Houghton argued that the release of the movie, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, led many former POWs to ‘publish their own accounts in order to establish a counter-narrative in the public domain, a process which continued into the 2010s.’¹²⁴

In a study of British POWs during World War One, historian Ian Isherwood argued that prisoners wrote memoirs to show that they were ‘active participants in the war effort on a wider scale. Writing became a means of recapturing that forfeited masculinity and showing that prisoners were doing their part from within

¹²¹ Alastair Thomson, ‘Anzac Stories: Using Personal Testimony in War History’, *War & Society*, 25, 2 (2006), p. 12.

¹²² Thomson, p. 5.

¹²³ Thomson, p. 7.

¹²⁴ Frances Houghton, ‘“To the Kwai and Back”: Myth, Memory and Memoirs of the “Death Railway” 1942-1943’, *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 7, 3 (August, 2014), p. 224.

the enemy's territory.'¹²⁵ Likewise, MacKenzie argued that the public's appetite for stories containing heroism influenced captivity memoirs, because 'while escapers could record actions that suggested admirable character traits, those officers who chose to sit tight, however logical and selfless their motives, had nothing to record that the public was interested in reading.'¹²⁶ The memoirs that this thesis has examined share some of these flaws, and many authors tended to promote a portrayal of captivity that they deemed acceptable. New Zealand post-captivity accounts often conformed to a narrative structure which emphasised the men's resistance to authority through descriptions of escapes and sabotage. However, a closer reading showed that the men documented subtler forms of resistance, as well. There were many possible reasons for memoir writing, including recognition, money, confirming or rejecting an accepted narrative, but most shared the desire to document their experience. The memoir became the ultimate form of resistance, its completion was a reminder that they survived.

Historian Clare Makepeace has produced the most recent scholarship of the POW experience. However, in her study of British prisoners, she disregarded the use of memoirs as historical sources, noting that:

Memoirs may also offer the historian unique insights into how wartime imprisonment was experienced, whether because censorship prevented a full and frank discussion of life in captivity or because, with the passage of time, the author became able to better articulate and construct a coherent narrative of what he went through. However, it is impossible to separate any such insights that memoirs offer from how those events have subsequently been interpreted through the filter of memory.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Ian Isherwood, 'Writing the "ill-managed nursery": British POW memoirs of the First World War', *First World War Studies*, 5, 3 (2014), p. 268.

¹²⁶ S.P. MacKenzie, 'The Ethics of Escape: British Officer POWs in the First World War', *War in History*, 15, 1 (2008), p. 16.

¹²⁷ Clare Makepeace, *Captives of War: British Prisoners of War in Europe in the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 24.

Makepeace was mistaken in ignoring memoirs, especially when she favoured diaries written in captivity, but which covered past events.¹²⁸ A reflective memory does not have to be a falsehood, and because captivity was a strange experience, many POWs needed time to comprehend their experience. Compared to Makepeace, Hynes took a positive view of war memoirs, because ‘war narratives are by their nature retrospective,’ and to ‘perceive the changes that war has made in a man requires the passage of time and the establishment of distance from the remembered self’.¹²⁹ He contended that those who had been to war and wrote memoirs were motivated to do so out of a sense of isolation and a need to comprehend their experience. In essence, ‘these books are communications among the members of that secret army, the men who have been there and will understand, as other generations will not and cannot.’¹³⁰ Hynes argued that memoirs were powerful sources, because they document ‘the remembered war that persists in the mind through the lifetime.’¹³¹ This idea of soldiers re-evaluating their wartime experiences through memoir writing was further explored by historian Joanna Bourke, who argued that

the act of framing extremes of violence is integral to the process of enabling perpetrators of violence to assimilate their acts into a peacetime ‘self’. In other words, to survive being a perpetrator may not be a matter of either ‘forgetting’ or ‘remembering’, but of finding a legitimate narrative that can ‘place’ the self in a way that is both coherent and convincing.¹³²

Similarly, linguist Lilie Chouliaraki stated that memoirs offered wartime participants a ‘narrative platform through which they can place these fragments into a coherent pattern and produce a sense of self that invests their war experience with meaning.’¹³³ Just like regular soldiers who faced the horrors of

¹²⁸ Makepeace, p. 16.

¹²⁹ Hynes, *The Soldiers’ Tale*, pp. 3-4.

¹³⁰ Hynes, *The Soldiers’ Tale*, p. 6.

¹³¹ Samuel Hynes, ‘Personal Narratives and Commemoration’, in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 211.

¹³² Joanna Bourke, ‘Introduction: “Remembering” War’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 39 (2004), p. 480.

¹³³ Lilie Chouliaraki, ‘From War Memoirs to Milblogs: Language Change in the Witnessing of War, 1914-2014’, *Discourse & Society*, 25, 5 (2014), p. 603.

the battlefield, POWs suffered a prolonged traumatic ordeal that would, no doubt, have been hard to comprehend. The time spent in captivity, coupled with the guilt of surrender, meant that many POWs were reserved about their wartime experience. For many, it was only in the later parts of their lives that they found their voice, turning to memoir writing to document their experience. Therefore, memoirs, as Bourke noted, helped POWs frame their strange experience into a legitimate narrative that explained their role in World War Two. These documents remain a key source for historians, enabling insight into the POW experience.

Hynes' most telling argument regarding the importance of memoirs was his opinion on the strangeness of war. The need to comprehend what had happened to them was crucial to the men documenting their story. Equally important was the need 'to show how *unfamiliar* war is, how strange and desolate its ordinary scenes are.'¹³⁴ Regarding the POW experience, Hynes argued that:

I've been saying all through this book that war is a strange and unimaginable experience, but these memoirs of prison life are an exception: there is no *strangeness* in them. The men who were sent to the camps seem quickly to have made themselves at home there. Each camp became at once an organized community, with a government, a class structure, strict codes of behaviour, and a busy social life.¹³⁵

His contention that captivity was familiar to many POWs, because they had the ability to construct their space into a lesser image of home, is misguided. Many New Zealanders exclaimed in their narratives that they never imagined being captured. These men ended up spending significant time behind the wire, a situation that was most certainly strange. This study argues that POWs made conscious and unconscious decisions to bring elements of home life into their camps, but it does not mistake these survival measures for a familiar environment.

¹³⁴ Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale*, p. 6.

¹³⁵ Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale*, p. 238.

The POW camps were still isolated, brutal and depressing places where the power and authority of the captors were ever-present.

Though written sources are central to our ability to recreate accurate portrayals of past events, they are not the only tools afforded to us. This study also makes use of oral interviews with former New Zealand POWs to add another layer of depth to our understanding of the POW experience. McDowell contended that the use of oral evidence helps to ‘humanise and enrich history by reminding us that the study of the past should include the study of the lives of ordinary people, their attitudes, beliefs, motives, experiences and actions.’¹³⁶ Although oral sources are important to historical studies, McDowell identified several weaknesses, notably the selectivity of information provided by the interviewee and the inability to place individual experiences into a wider context.¹³⁷ He concluded by stating that researching oral sources could provide ‘a few missing pieces of the jigsaw, but it cannot provide a complete picture.’¹³⁸

Regarding the reliability of people to remember events accurately, historians Anna Green and Kathleen Troup contended that ‘memories of crucial experiences may be re-evaluated and re-contextualized throughout life, but they remain the basis upon which individual memory, and our sense of self-identity, is constructed.’¹³⁹ This point is important to this thesis, because not all prisoners of war documented their lives in diaries or memoirs. It is only over time that they came to terms with their experience, allowing them to finally feel comfortable enough to share their tale.

While such materials were limited, prisoners also documented their captivity through illustrations and photographs. When examining these sources, it is

¹³⁶ McDowell, p. 60.

¹³⁷ McDowell, p. 62.

¹³⁸ McDowell, p. 62.

¹³⁹ *The Houses of History*, ed. by Anna Green and Kathleen Troup (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 213.

necessary to look beyond the visual representation of imprisonment and question how the images were constructed. Cultural historian Catherine E. Clark noted that, 'Textual sources can provide context for what the photographs picture and for the history of their collection and use, but the photographs themselves can also drive the inquiry and form part of the argument.'¹⁴⁰ Although both illustrations and photographs serve as a visual reminder of captivity, after examining these sources it was evident that each was created in a different context. Drawings were more personal, usually scattered indifferently throughout an individual's diary. Some artists tried to find a humour in their bleak existence, using cartoons to emphasise the strangeness of captivity. Others portrayed the men's depressing remoteness and their nostalgic longing for home. The presence of drawings suggests that prisoners used illustrations when they were unable to find the right words to express themselves.

While most drawings were a glimpse into an unspoken response to captivity, something to remain hidden within the men's war memorabilia, there was a desire for photographs to become widely viewed. The photographers usually neglected the restrictive surroundings, instead focusing on the prisoners in action. The POWs' agency was at the forefront when recording the theatrical productions or sporting activities. These images preserved the more positive aspects of captivity, perhaps because when they were taken the men were not in distress. Although this thesis uses these photographs, it is important to remember that they were constructed under the restrictions of captivity. Most have been staged, presumably with the permission of the guards.

The combination of these source types helps to illustrate a collective experience where New Zealand soldiers transitioned into POWs who were at the mercy of their captors. Their tale features uncertainty, isolation, physical hardships and daily monotony. But they never lost their ability to shape their environment. New

¹⁴⁰ Catherine E. Clark, 'Capturing the Moment, Picturing History: Photographs of the Liberation of Paris', *American Historical Review* (June, 2016), p. 825.

Zealand POWs did not simply resign themselves to their fate, they were active in their efforts to improve daily camp life, for both themselves and their comrades. Small elements of home life sprouted up in POW camps throughout Europe, helping to connect prisoners with their previous lives and making their ordeal more manageable.

Theoretical Background

The men's ability to cope with captivity is rooted in the theories of escapism. Prisoners needed distractions from their confronting situation. Without moments of enjoyment, the monotony of captivity was overwhelming. Sociologist Chris Rojek argued that, to study leisure activities, it is necessary to understand that these moments of excitement were in contrast to the monotony of daily life.¹⁴¹ Rojek noted that experiencing an 'adventure enables the individual to slip momentarily through the reality net of everyday life. But if modern everyday life is to be at all possible the adventure must be momentary.'¹⁴² While his statement was made toward civilian life, it also reflects the pressures of imprisonment. This thesis argues that POWs used escapism to cope with the monotony and isolation of captivity. Faced with an endless wait for their freedom, prisoners engaged in leisure activities as an escape from daily routine.

In a study of long-term criminal prisoners, sociologists Stanley Cohen and Laurie Taylor examined how inmates coped with imprisonment.¹⁴³ Much of their work centred on the belief that prisoners segmented their leisure activities from general prison life. Inmates created enclaves where they resisted the reality of their situation and instead became consumed by activities.¹⁴⁴ This separation included the prisoners' fantasies, with Cohen and Taylor arguing that:

¹⁴¹ Chris Rojek, *Ways of Escape: Modern Transformations in Leisure and Travel* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1993), p. 9.

¹⁴² Rojek, p. 103.

¹⁴³ Stanley Cohen and Laurie Taylor, *Escape Attempts: The Theory and Practice of Resistance to Everyday Life* (London: Allen Lane, 1976).

¹⁴⁴ Cohen and Taylor, p. 136.

The world of the long-term prisoner for example is so circumscribed, so lacking in variety that he is permitted, indeed even expected to have some sort of fantasy world into which to retreat, some private unobserved place for identity work.¹⁴⁵

While their bodies were restricted by prison authorities, the men's minds were free. Many POWs found themselves in a similar situation. Their movements and ability to communicate with the outside world were restricted, but they maintained control over their fantasies. POWs found relief in their dreams of home and the hope for a future without guards and wire.

This thesis draws inspiration from current scholarly work on spatial history and the impact that environments have on experiences. Gerontologist Graham Rowles examined the impact that decreasing mobility had on elderly people and their daily lives.¹⁴⁶ Rowles argued that, through interactions with other elderly people in the area, 'a mutual sense of belonging' developed which 'provided reassurance in accommodating to distressing contemporary environmental change.'¹⁴⁷ This observation is not dissimilar to that experienced by New Zealand POWs. Through a series of events that were largely out of their control, these men found themselves imprisoned for an unknown time. The ability to share their daily lives with people who also had been disempowered helped to create a common bond and group identity. Rowles also contended that elderly people could temporarily remove themselves from their confined space by engaging in fantasy, dreams or past experiences.¹⁴⁸ This method of escaping reality was also used by POWs, especially when they received news from home.

The unfamiliarity of the spaces where prisoners were held, especially in North Africa, proved disorienting. A lack of landmarks or familiar terrain provided a

¹⁴⁵ Cohen and Taylor, p. 70.

¹⁴⁶ Graham Rowles, 'Toward a Geography of Growing Old', in *The Human Experience of Place*, ed. by Anne Buttner and David Seamon (London: Croom Helm, 1980), p. 56.

¹⁴⁷ Rowles, p. 60.

¹⁴⁸ Rowles, p. 60.

barren backdrop to the already confronting experience of defeat and capture. In these moments, POWs struggled to comprehend how their future would reconcile with their expected wartime experience of victory and glory. Psychiatrist Mindy Thomson Fullilove discussed the impact spatial factors have on a person's mentality, arguing that, 'The familiar environment, in part because it can be taken for granted, is a source of ease and comfort. The unfamiliar environment evokes "fight or flight" responses, especially a heightened awareness of danger and attention to detail in the surroundings.'¹⁴⁹ With this in mind, the thesis argues that prisoners rejected their unfamiliar spaces. Their accounts emphasised a constant resistance against the unfamiliar; there were continual attempts to shape their camps and experiences into something more familiar.

Space played a central role in the POW experience, no more so than when relating to individual and group identity. Doctor Michael Godkin argued that spaces were more than 'the physical stage for life's drama. Some are profound centers of meanings and symbols of experience. As such, they lie at the core of human existence.'¹⁵⁰ Geographer Anne Buttimer further explored the importance that space plays in identity construction, concluding that a sudden 'Loss of home or "losing one's place" may often trigger an identity crisis.'¹⁵¹ This identity crisis occurred during the early stages of the POW experience, with the transition from soldier to captive being a deeply confronting part of their ordeal. POWs felt self-doubt, pity and anger as they came to terms with their disempowerment. Godkin examined the lives of alcoholics and argued that their lack of self-worth resulted in an identity crisis he termed '*uprootedness* – a sense of non-belonging to place.'¹⁵² Their inability to connect with their environment triggered feelings of self-doubt, lack of integrity and a loss of identity. However, Godkin contended

¹⁴⁹ Mindy Thompson Fullilove, 'Psychiatric Implications of Displacement: Contributions From the Psychology of Place', *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 153, 12 (December, 1996), p. 1518.

¹⁵⁰ Michael Godkin, 'Identity and Place: Clinical Applications Based on Notions of Rootedness and Uprootedness', in *The Human Experience of Place*, ed. by Anne Buttimer and David Seamon (London: Croom Helm, 1980), p. 73.

¹⁵¹ Anne Buttimer, 'Home, Reach, and the Sense of Place', in *The Human Experience of Place*, ed. by Anne Buttimer and David Seamon (London: Croom Helm, 1980), p. 167.

¹⁵² Godkin, p. 75.

that the alcoholics he examined had moments of rootedness, where they experienced a recollection of their previous lives.¹⁵³ He explained that:

These illustrations of rootedness for the alcoholic, as few as they are, indicate that positive images of places can provide a concrete focus for the attachments, retention and development of self-identity. Experiences supporting a sense and coherence of self are ‘captured’ and retained in memory partially as an image of the place where the positive experiences originally occurred.¹⁵⁴

Godkin’s assertion that even those who felt no sense of belonging to their physical space experienced positive moments through memory is revealing of the POW experience. New Zealand POWs felt isolated and abandoned in their foreign surroundings. Their remoteness from their homeland was an experience one could term ‘uprooted’, so it was realistic that they, too, would feel a sense of non-belonging. However, by implementing elements of their old lives in camp routines, POWs experienced moments of pleasure, albeit briefly. The ability to interact with loved ones via mail, to play sports or to take part in academic study helped to remind POWs of previous pleasurable experiences. This thesis furthers this argument by exploring the spaces that New Zealand POWs constructed to escape the pressures of captivity.

The theme of resistance is a useful framework when analysing how people react to situations when their ability to express themselves is restricted. Many studies have shown that resistance is not limited to aggressive actions, but also includes subtler forms of rebellion. One of the common talking points in these papers was the relationship between space and resistance. Everyday actions could be interpreted as acts of resistance, based on the context of when and where they took place. Anthropologist James Scott argued that ‘neither everyday forms of resistance nor the occasional insurrection can be understood without reference to

¹⁵³ Godkin, p. 77.

¹⁵⁴ Godkin, p. 79.

the sites at which such resistance can be nurtured and given meaning.’¹⁵⁵

Sociologists Anna Johansson and Stellan Vinthagen agreed that space could change an everyday action into an act of resistance. In their analysis of the lives of Palestinians, they argued that subtler forms of resistance were common. They noted that,

it is clear that acts of resistance, such as occupying the bathroom in prison for a long time or putting on a manadeel, are not part of a formally organized or planned collective action with a clear political intention, and furthermore, they would not make sense as resistance outside of their specific context.¹⁵⁶

Historian Gary Okihiro presented a similar argument when he examined the lives of Japanese-Americans who were interned during World War Two. Okihiro argued that when the context of the camps was taken into account, the internees’ insistence in maintaining their culture constituted a form of resistance.¹⁵⁷

Likewise, historian Sophie Caplan noted that ‘the preservation within Nazi concentration camps of even some aspects of one’s culture, of one’s former relationships with fellow human beings, was a form of psychological resistance which aided survival.’ In a study that shares some similarities with this thesis, historian Robert La Forte examined the forms of resistance used by POWs in Japanese camps. La Forte argued that resistance could be seen in the men’s shoddy work, their desire to stave off boredom and, perhaps most importantly, the maintenance of their self-respect.¹⁵⁸ This thesis analyses similar acts of resistance and argues that these efforts highlighted how the men tried to reject their identity as captives.

¹⁵⁵ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 20.

¹⁵⁶ Anna Johansson and Stellan Vinthagen, ‘Dimensions of everyday resistance: the Palestinian *Sumud*’, *Journal of Political Power*, 8, 1 (2015), p. 115.

¹⁵⁷ Gary Y. Okihiro, ‘Religion and Resistance in America’s Concentration Camps’, *Phylon* (1960-), 45, 3 (3rd Qtr., 1984), p. 222.

¹⁵⁸ Robert S. La Forte, ‘Resistance in Japanese Prison Camps during World War II’, *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, 12, 1-2 (Spring-Summer, 2003), p. 106.

Shape of the Thesis

In summary, the literature on the POW experience has previously been dominated by tales of escape and brutality, especially New Zealand histories that have tended to be targeted toward a popular audience. However, recent efforts, including those made by Australian historians, have shifted the focus away from these simplified narratives toward a more critical exploration of the daily pressures of POW life. My analysis is grounded in and continues the important work of these scholars. The sources required to accurately portray the internal lives of the POWs are complex, but through a thorough understanding of their advantages and limitations, they provide a nuanced portrayal of the POW experience.

The thesis divides the POW experience into three phases: capture, resisting captivity and then the transition out of captivity. This was necessary because everyone adjusted or failed to adjust to captivity at different times. The current structure presents the POW experience as one of dislocation, with the men struggling to understand their failure to fulfil their expected wartime roles. It is followed by an extended period of stability, in which they tried to control the spaces where they were held and resist their identities as captives. This middle phase shows the shift from outward displays of resistance to subtler, more internal acts. The ordering of these chapters represents the men's initial optimism that they could overcome their situation and then their gradual morale decline over a prolonged captivity. The thesis concludes as the men transitioned out of their camps and had to come to terms with the idea that the familiar world that they had wished to return to had been changed by the war.

In Chapter One, I examine the initial phase of captivity, notably the dislocation associated with defeat, capture and constant movement through many transit camps in Greece, Crete and North Africa. During this period, New Zealand POWs faced atrocious physical conditions, largely because the enemy was ill-prepared to house the vast number of men captured. They suffered mentally with their uncertain future, while questions about identity, blame and despair became

constants in camp life. At this time, they made no concerted efforts to improve their condition; instead, POWs were occupied with coming to grips with their current state of affairs and survival. Although disorienting, the men's willingness to absolve themselves of responsibility for their situation and the desire to be moved to more permanent facilities began a recurring theme which lies at the heart of this thesis. The men wanted to exert some control over the spaces they were held and they wanted to be seen as something others than captives.

Chapter Two begins the middle phase of this thesis which focuses on the POWs' varied and complex resistance. The chapter analyses the men's physical attempts to escape the camp space. As popular histories suggest, some men did participate in escapes to reconnect with the war and rediscover their soldierly identities. And although this thesis is critical of the escape narrative, the men's aggressive resistance is a recurring theme which needs to be addressed. But rather than solely arguing that these actions were driven by a need to fulfil a sense of duty, chapter two offers a deeper understanding of escapes. These attempts were often coordinated by groups. For men who were isolated and lonely, these groups were valuable support networks. Although some prisoners wanted to cause disruption to the enemy, others simply wanted something to do. Trying to escape was an act of rejecting the men's routine existence, it was a desire for adventure and risk.

After examining the men's attempts to physically escape captivity, Chapter Three shifts the analysis toward other forms of escape and resistance. It highlights the physical, intellectual and cultural activities that the men used to contest the camp space. The chapter explores how the POWs' emotional state affected their ability to participate in these activities. In most cases, facilities for physical and mental release were rudimentary in the initial phases of captivity. But over time, as POWs came to terms with their new existence, they renewed their efforts to not let this period of their lives be wasted. Men took the opportunity to study, to bond and to better themselves. Creativity flourished as POWs wrote poetry, performed plays and participated in sports. Academic study became a prominent feature of camp life, with men looking to their future job prospects. Of course, this

discussion could paint an overly romantic portrayal of the POW experience. They were forced into these activities, because they had no other option. But it was important to their mental health that they maintained some semblance of normalcy. This was a subtler form of resistance which showed how the men tried to find meaning in their experience. In a life full of uniformity and restrictions, they found ways to express themselves. Eventually, when the war reached its final stages and camp conditions worsened, participation in these distractions diminished. POWs were too preoccupied with survival to concern themselves with lectures or games.

Chapter Four examines the men's work experiences. Work commitments continually disrupted the men's ability to familiarise their experience. When the men discussed the morality of work in post-captivity accounts, they often resisted the perception that their labour helped the enemy's war effort. They refused their identities as workers and took on the roles of shirkers or saboteurs. I also analyse the simple economic systems that featured heavily in camp life. Tracking their development from barter and trade to a more complex currency based economy, I argue that these systems fundamentally shaped the spaces that POWs populated. The chapter discusses how supplies arrived at camps and how they were distributed. More important, it explores the connections that these commodities helped to facilitate. A constant stream of Red Cross parcels, with their cigarette allotment, allowed men to exchange goods and services with one another. However, when the supplies were disrupted, camps experienced conditions similar to economic recessions. In these harsher times, some men complained about instances of crime and corruption. The chapter shows that some men were willing to undermine their fellow prisoners to survive. It adds a layer of individualism which could be lost if we view prisoners as a collective, working together to endure their experience.

The previous chapters emphasised the men's resistance attempts, but these actions were not always successful in combating the strangeness of captivity. Chapter Five discusses the emotional and mental stress that captivity placed on POWs. In

particular, the chapter explores the feeling of complete isolation that many men experienced. Notably, it uses POW diaries and letters to portray their daily struggle with uncertainty and depression. Even though the men's mental health deteriorated as their captivity became prolonged, there were still efforts to resist these pressures. Men clung to any news of home or information that the war might soon be over. But for many, the wait would be long and arduous. This chapter is focused on how the spaces POWs inhabited influenced their experience, but it also details how POWs did not let their isolated existence overwhelm them.

Chapter Six examines the final phase of captivity through an analysis of the men's experiences as they were forced to march across Europe during the closing months of the war. It was a time when the power relationships that had been established inside the camps came into question, especially as the POWs became increasingly aware that they were responsible for their own wellbeing. The transition away from captivity did not go as many men had expected. Although the wire had disappeared, POWs struggled to break habits that had become second nature. They still feared the guards, and they still longed for home. During these marches, most POWs had their first experiences with the outside world in years; but rather than the world they had been dreaming of, they were awoken to a shattered Europe, with the horrors of Nazi Germany plain to see.

Overall, this study sheds new light and provides new information on the New Zealand POW experience and argues that the POWs resisted captivity in a variety of everyday acts. It emphasises the role that the men played in contesting their identities and their desire to exert control over the spaces they inhabited. This agency disputes the notion that the POWs were passive subjects.

Chapter One – The Transition from Soldiers to Captives

When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes
I all alone beweepe my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself, and curse my fate....¹

Optimism and excitement buoyed morale as New Zealand soldiers entered World War Two. Many expressed a belief in the superiority of the British military tradition. However, for those who fought in the Greek and North African campaigns of 1941 and 1942, the trauma of military defeats awoke them to the harsh realities of war. These engagements resulted in the large majority of New Zealand POWs, who faced an uncertain future.² When recalling his capture in his memoir, Padre John Ledgerwood quoted William Shakespeare to express his sense of desolation. In a simple recitation of Shakespeare's work, Ledgerwood reflected the POWs' collective questioning of why had this happened to them? Who was to blame? And how long would they be captives?

For many of these men, their initial capture proved deeply dislocating and raised significant questions about their individual identities. Geographer Anne Buttimer contended that 'people's sense of both personal and cultural identity is intimately bound up with place identity. Loss of home or "losing one's place" may often trigger an identity crisis.'³ The dislocation and disempowerment of surrender resulted in a confronting and emasculating experience for POWs. As soldiers serving overseas, the men had a limited connection with family and home, but these relationships were further disrupted by captivity. Moreover, they suffered

¹ William Shakespeare, in John Ledgerwood, *Stalag XVIIIa Wolfsburg*, MS-Papers-5644-3, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 1.

² According to the official history, 9140 New Zealanders were captured. In Greece 1856 men were taken prisoner, similar to the 2180 men taken in Crete. The campaigns in Libya and Syria resulted in 3861 New Zealand prisoners of war. Mason, pp. v-viii.

³ Anne Buttimer, 'Home, Reach, and the Sense of Place', in *The Human Experience of Place*, ed. by Anne Buttimer and David Seamon (London: Croom Helm, 1980), p. 167.

another loss of place identity, because the structures that had been instilled in them during their military training and service were displaced.

This chapter explores the early weeks and months of captivity as New Zealand servicemen transitioned from soldiers to captives. In doing so, it raises questions about how POWs reconciled their humiliating and unnerving circumstances while trying to maintain some semblance of their prior lives. The chapter argues that some POWs coped with captivity by shifting the blame for their military defeat from themselves to an abstract higher power. It highlights their attempts to preserve hope and military routine by believing that their recapture was imminent and that their war was not over. On top of the unusual experience of being captured, prisoners were held in transit camps that lacked elements of familiarity. Although their capture experiences were confronting, the chapter emphasises the men's desire to resist the strangeness of captivity through their willingness to contest their identities. Even in these initial stages of their imprisonment the men wanted to be seen as something other than captives. The chapter concludes as POWs were shifted from their temporary camps to permanent camps.

New Zealand soldiers were committed to defend Greece, Crete and North Africa in the early stages of the war in an attempt to halt the Axis advance. New Zealand's expeditionary force was stationed in North Africa, and their importance increased after the area's strategic value was threatened by Italy's entry into the war in June 1940.⁴ With the Axis powers achieving military successes in Poland, and future threats looming, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill was 'Keen to build a "Balkan Front" to impress neutral American public opinion'.⁵ Unfortunately for Churchill, his options to defend the area were limited, and thus the expeditionary armies of Australia and New Zealand were called into action.⁶ The battles in Greece and Crete were disasters for the Allies and were especially

⁴ 'Background', URL: <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/war/the-north-african-campaign/background>, (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 20-Dec-2012, [accessed 15 March 2015].

⁵ Peter Ewer, *Forgotten Anzacs: The Campaigns in Greece, 1941* (Carlton North: Scribe, 2008), p. 3.

⁶ Ewer, p. 3.

costly to New Zealand. In total, nearly 1,000 New Zealanders died, and 4,036 were taken prisoner.⁷ The campaigns in North Africa were costly as well, but ultimately the Allies succeeded in defending the region.

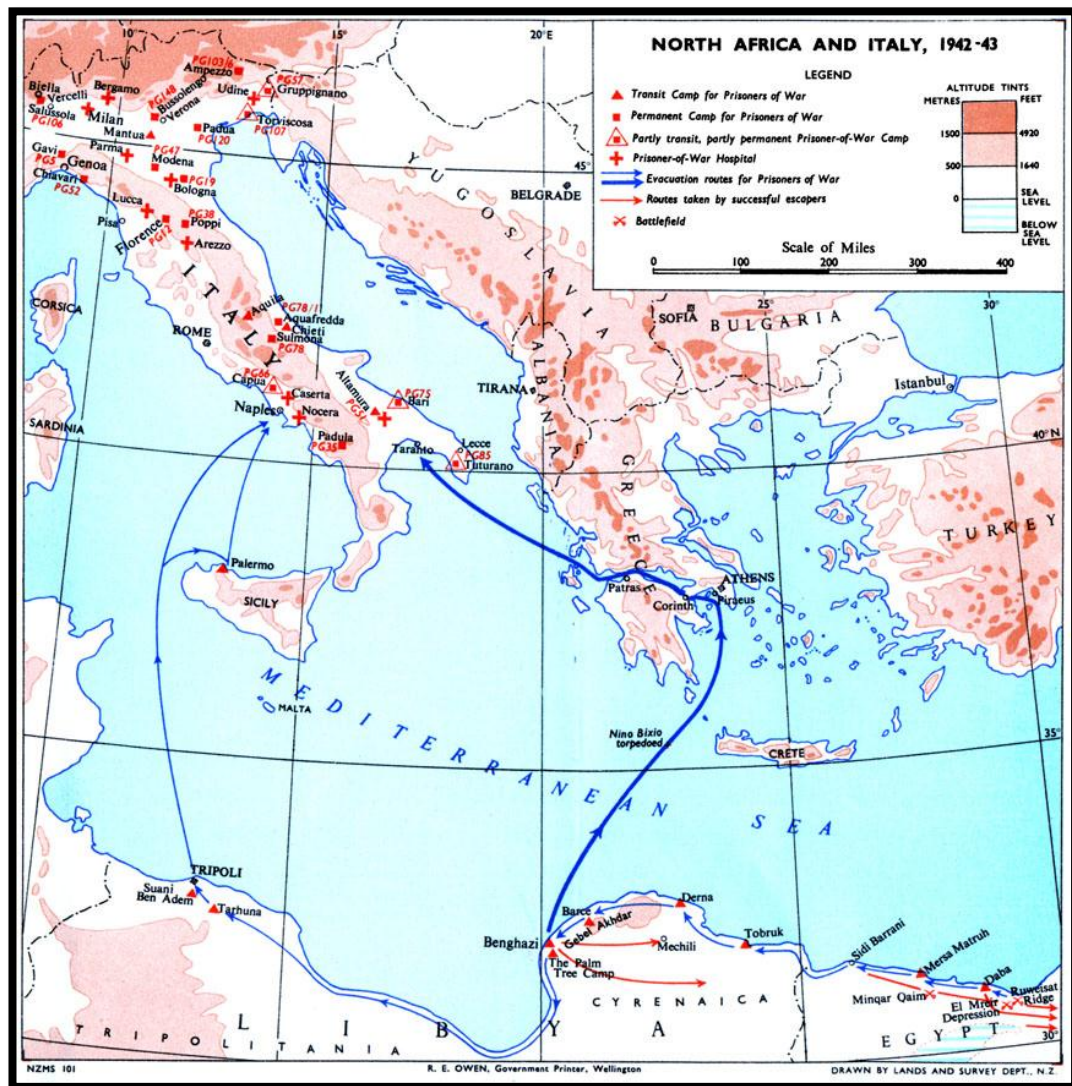


Figure 1.1. Prisoner of War Camps in North Africa, Greece and Italy.⁸

⁷ 'The Battle for Crete', URL: <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/war/the-battle-for-crete>, (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 5-Aug-2014, [accessed 15 March 2015];

'Background', URL: <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/war/the-north-african-campaign/background>, (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 20-Dec-2012, [accessed 15 March 2015].

⁸ W. Wynne Mason, *Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939-1945: Prisoners of War* (Wellington: War History Branch, Dept. of Internal Affairs, 1954), p. 193.

New Zealand POWs captured by the German and Italian forces were protected by the Geneva Convention, which, theoretically, ensured a certain level of treatment. Captured soldiers were aware of their rights, with Ledgerwood noting that ‘Men began to talk about a Geneva Convention almost as reverently as one would talk about a priceless edition of Holy Writ.’⁹ The men’s reliance on their captors to provide them with the supplies to survive limited the agency of the POWs, and remained a constant reminder of who held the ultimate power in the camp space. Warrant Officer Jack Elworthy recalled, ‘Trust was a very important part of our lives. We had to trust that our captors would abide by the Geneva Convention and keep us alive and sheltered.’¹⁰ This trust was often tested as the captors struggled to provide for the large number of POWs. To lessen the burden on the captors, benevolent societies, such as the Red Cross, were able to provide regular care packages and opportunities for POWs to discuss their grievances. The influence of these societies were critical to the survival of most POWs.

For many of the men who had enlisted expecting glory and adventure, the prospect of becoming a POW was a distant thought. American sociologist Walter Lunden contended that the transition from soldier to captive was particularly disorienting, because

most prisoners of war are taken in combat or intense fighting when most of their energy has been spent and they are near the end of their endurance. Strange as it may seem, very few soldiers, if any, anticipate or prepare for capture. It comes as a completely unanticipated misfortune.¹¹

Similarly, historian David Rolf noted that, ‘Faced by such ferocious odds against surviving, men tried to keep death at arm’s length; and, since they rarely thought seriously about being killed, the idea of being captured or suffering long-term

⁹ Ledgerwood, p. 3.

¹⁰ Jack Elworthy, *Greece, Crete, Stalag, Dachau: A New Zealand Soldier’s Encounters with Hitler’s Army*, ed. by Jo Elworthy (Wellington: Awa Press, 2014), p. 169.

¹¹ Walter A. Lunden, ‘Captivity Psychoses among Prisoners of War’, *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 39, 6 (1949), p. 725.

imprisonment seemed an even more remote possibility.¹² The men's inability to prepare themselves for the possibility of capture was prominent through the accounts of New Zealand POWs. In a memoir written decades after his capture, Lance Corporal Arch Scott recalled his despair at being captured near El Alamein, Egypt, in 1942:

I had never thought of nor heard mentioned the chance, the possibility of being taken prisoner. What an utterly devastating thought! What an anti-climax to the 'death and glory' feeling and the belief that you were being given the chance to strike a blow for freedom ... the freedom of the world! And now you'd lost your own! It was almost too much for the mind to grasp, or was something that the mind just didn't want to acknowledge.¹³

It was revealing that Scott struggled with his initial capture, because it was the antithesis of what he expected of his wartime experience. Scott believed that he was fighting for the freedom of the world, but had suddenly lost his own. He referenced that death on the battlefield was an acceptable form of obtaining glory. His experience was frustrating, because his story lacked the familiar traits associated with victory or making an honourable sacrifice in defeat.

Scott's initial reaction to captivity was echoed by countless other New Zealand POWs, including Brigadier James Hargest. Hargest was captured in 1941 at Sidi Azeiz, Libya, while commanding an infantry brigade as they attempted to relieve Tobruk. Their mission was unsuccessful, and many New Zealanders were captured by the Germans. Their failure and subsequent imprisonment shocked Hargest, with him writing, 'I realized for the first time what the day's catastrophe meant. Defeat, loss, grief; and the prospect of months, perhaps years, in prison.'¹⁴ Like Scott, Hargest was ill-prepared for captivity, because he had contemplated

¹² David Rolf, *Prisoners of the Reich: Germany's Captives 1939-1945* (London: Leo Cooper Ltd, 1988), p. 5.

¹³ Arch Scott, *Dark of the Moon: The Unusual Story of one Kiwi's War* (Auckland: Cresset Books, 1985), p. 37.

¹⁴ James Hargest, *Farewell Campo 12* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd, 1945), p. 21.

giving his life for the cause, but ‘never for one moment thought of capture.’¹⁵ When recalling his capture in Greece in 1941, Private Arthur Coe remembered feeling ‘a wave of hopelessness and utter disbelief that this was for real. A hundred thoughts flashed through my mind.’¹⁶ Similarly, Private Ray Kennedy recalled his capture at El Alamein in 1942, ‘To stand there, arms raised above the head in surrender.... Have never felt so alone.’¹⁷ The above narratives showed that the dominant emotions of being captured were loneliness and disbelief.

The shock that many POWs experienced as they transitioned from soldiers to captives raised self-doubt and identity questions. Ledgerwood contended that POWs struggled to comprehend their disempowerment, noting that, ‘The catastrophies of the Greece and Crete campaigns and the suddenness of the physical change from active soldiering to prisoner of war life, left the mind in a torpor as to render one temporarily incapable of reniniscences [*sic*].’¹⁸ Ledgerwood’s statement suggested that the sudden change from being active soldiers to the stasis of captivity was confronting. As soldiers, the men were mobile and had duties to fulfil. However, the initial weeks of POW life lacked this familiar structure. The disbelief of capture left many POWs numb to what was happening to them.

Many POWs had entered the conflict expecting to be part of a grand military operation and contribute to the nation’s proud history. However, upon capture, they were overwhelmed by desperation and isolation. The guilt and humiliation that some POWs felt was expressed by Sergeant Bruce Crowley, who recalled that their surrender in Greece was ‘A disgrace. We were prepared to fight and die – not to be captured. We never thought we’d be prisoners of war. We were very

¹⁵ Hargest, p. 21.

¹⁶ Arthur Coe, Unpublished Manuscript, 2005.291, The Kippenberger Military Archive, Waiouru, New Zealand, p. 8.

¹⁷ Ray Kennedy, Typescript Diary, MS-Papers-7439-04, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 2.

¹⁸ Ledgerwood, p. 1.

ashamed.’¹⁹ Crowley’s statement showed how captivity contrasted with the men’s expected war experience. He had envisaged himself as a soldier, fighting the enemy and even dying. This imagined wartime role was flavoured by romanticised notions of bravery and sacrifice. In Crowley’s account, captivity was associated with failure, and he was ashamed that he was not able to fulfil his expected role as a soldier.

Lieutenant Daniel Riddiford, a soldier at Sidi Rezegh, Libya, vividly portrayed the state of his group at the time of surrender in 1941:

We stood in silent, dejected groups in pathetic contrast to our guards whose cheerfulness seemed boundless. To be captured seems like passing through the gates of death. One’s entire world seems to have disintegrated. The solid framework of discipline, morale and organisation, upon which an Army is built, is dissolved, and each individual is pitchforked out into a colder world where he is without companions and has no one but himself to rely on.²⁰

Riddiford described his group’s transition from soldier to captive in a way that used imagery of death and rebirth, but a rebirth that did not follow the typical model of hope and possibility, but a transition to chaos and a bleak and ‘colder’ world. Their identities were based on being soldiers, but as they became prisoners the structures of the military were stripped from them. Capture represented the end of their identity as fighting men, and the start of their POW experience. It was revealing that Riddiford contended that as soldiers the men were organised and worked together. However, in their new existence, he felt that they were no longer beholden to hierarchy and rank; instead, they became isolated and alone.

¹⁹ Julia Millen, *North to Apricots: The Escape Stories of Sergeant Bruce Crowley DCM New Zealand Prisoner of War Greece & Germany 1941-1943* (Wellington: Bocoman Ltd, 2012), p. xiii.

²⁰ Daniel Riddiford MC, *Committed to Escape: A New Zealand Soldier’s Story*, ed. by Yvonne Riddiford (Martinborough: Ruamahanga Press Ltd, 2004), p. 13.

The loss of freedom weighed heavily on the POWs' minds, and they became increasingly aware of their pathetic appearance, compared to their captors. Elworthy argued that after their capture on Crete they had transitioned from 'swagger, smart, cheerful and confident' soldiers to 'dirty, exhausted, bewildered and bitter' prisoners.²¹ Sergeant John Hogg recalled that surrendering in Libya had robbed him of his identity and agency, contending that upon capture, 'I was no longer my own man.'²² George Landon-Lane was captured at Kalamata, Greece, and remembered that 'in one moment [we] lost our connection with our friends, and next of kin.'²³ This isolation from loved ones proved difficult for many POWs, and without these familiar bonds they lost a significant part of their individuality.

In addition to the shock of capture, many POWs expressed their surrender in abstract terms. It was generally referred to as something that happened without their involvement, either as a commanding officer surrendering or the situation becoming so bleak that there was no alternative. Landon-Lane remembered that his position at Kalamata 'became hopeless, when at three o'clock we were informed that all units had been surrendered to the enemy by the Brigadier.'²⁴ Private William Flint was also at Kalamata and recalled that 'word circulated that the brigadier, whoever he was, a Pommie I think, had unconditionally surrendered'.²⁵ The idea that they had no say over their predicament helped the POWs maintain aspects of their masculine identity, because it was not their choice to surrender. It is important to highlight that POWs like Flint placed the blame on an English officer, not on a fellow New Zealander. The natural reaction to blame the British for their capture implied a distrust toward foreigners. For prisoners who felt abandoned, it was almost like they were reliving the nightmare of the previous generation of New Zealanders who were sacrificed at Gallipoli.

²¹ Elworthy, p. 109.

²² John Hogg, *An Honourable Surrender: A New Zealand Soldier Remembers*, ed. by Julie Belding (Tauranga: Bay Officer Centre Printers Ltd, 1992), p. 46.

²³ George Landon-Lane, *Barbed Embrace: A travel series of adventure while the author was overseas and also a prisoner of war* (Blenheim: B. Mooney, 1986), p. 35.

²⁴ Landon-Lane, p. 35.

²⁵ *Inside Stories: New Zealand Prisoners of War Remember*, ed. by Megan Hutching (Auckland: Harper Collins, 2002), p. 68.

Although the POWs still felt ashamed, blaming their capture on an officer from another country helped them to distance themselves from the guilt of defeat. For other men, such as Captain Harold Smith, who was taken prisoner in Libya, defeat was hard to comprehend. Smith recalled that his circumstance was particularly unsettling as he ‘hadn’t fired a shot.’²⁶ Similarly, Major Archie MacDuff noted in his diary after being captured at Kalamata, ‘I am bewildered and immeasurably disappointed – the whole scene now seems like a phantasy – a bad dream.’²⁷

While men were stunned by the unforeseen event of being taken prisoner, many accounts expressed a desire to comprehend their captivity. Elworthy eloquently remembered the depressed state of the troops after the fall of Crete:

I knew we looked a rabble. We could hardly walk and we hadn’t washed, shaved or had our clothes off for a week. You could feel the despair – and also the bitterness. What had we done to deserve this? We had done all that we had to do, in fact more than we thought we could, because we believed in our leaders and our cause. But then our leaders had abandoned us without a word of warning. We had been left in a shameful and ignominious situation, dead or wounded, captured, starving, dependent on the whim of the enemy as to whether we lived or died. The future looked bleak.²⁸

Elworthy’s statement revealed the despondency that POWs felt upon their capture. The men reasoned that they were blameless in defeat and that they had fought bravely against the odds. They could not understand why their superiors had ‘abandoned’ them to captivity; ‘abandoned’ is a particularly strong word with its connotations of both desertion and giving up. There was a strong sense of the leaders abnegating their responsibility, and a separation between the suffering troops and those leaders who did not share their captive fate. The description of

²⁶ Harold Smith, *Memories of World War II: Experiences of a Junior Officer Greece, Crete, Egypt, Libya and POW* (Kaiaua: Smith Publications, 1996), p. 93.

²⁷ Archie Peter MacDuff, Diary, 1999.1089, The Kippenberger Military Archive, Waiouru, New Zealand, 29 April 1941.

²⁸ Elworthy, p. 115.

the men's poor physical state showed the privations that they were suffering. Elworthy noted that they felt bitter toward their superiors, to the point that the POWs blamed them for their physical hardships. He suggested that at this low point, his group was uncertain if they would ever be freed.

The transition from soldier to captive was an emasculating experience, but POWs reclaimed aspects of their masculine identity by reinterpreting their capture narrative. POWs absolved themselves and their comrades from blame; instead, they shifted the weight of defeat to their commanders and to a lack of preparation. Crowley was captured in Greece and concluded that New Zealand troops were expendable or 'At least that's what it felt like. Nobody knew what was happening to us and it seemed like nobody cared.'²⁹ Crowley blamed his superiors, noting that 'it wasn't our fault. We were overcome by superior forces, and Churchill's promise to the Greeks.'³⁰ Similarly, Ledgerwood recalled that the POWs found solace in absolving themselves of guilt, noting that men often reasoned that 'the officers were to blame – they had let us down – the British Government was to blame – it had sent us on a pre-destined failure – God was to blame – He hadn't intervened.'³¹ Hogg echoed this anger towards the military hierarchy, 'Had they not learnt anything in Greece and Crete, that they sent troops into action without first equipping them to do the job and without proper back up of tanks, artillery or air support?'³² POWs like Hogg reasoned that their defeat was because they lacked mechanical equipment rather than because they themselves failed. By shifting the blame onto these inanimate objects, the men reclaimed their masculinity by emphasising that if they had fought the Germans on an equal footing, the outcome may have been different.

What if they had fought harder? What if they were better prepared? These questions dominated the POWs' mental space and made them uncomfortable. It is no wonder that at this time POWs reflected on their identities and tried to reclaim

²⁹ Millen, p. 28.

³⁰ Millen, p. 30.

³¹ Ledgerwood, p. 1.

³² Hogg, p. 49.

their masculinity by expressing ill-feeling toward their superiors. In this bitter state, Private Peter Winter found comfort that he was not alone in this demoralising experience. He recalled his experience in Greece:

I was relieved that so many of my friends were among the prisoners. Not only were they companions in misfortune, but I had the consolation of knowing I was one of many without the foresight, guile, luck or stamina to have escaped.³³

Being able to share the burden and shame of captivity helped the POWs endure these early stages of their POW experience. Through adversity they forged bonds which reinforced their identities, with Lance Corporal Tony Vercoe remembering that the despondency many felt at Benghazi, Libya, was overcome by realising that 'We were soldiers. But mates too. Help each other if we could as we lived it one day at a time.'³⁴

In some cases POWs used poetry to show their depression and anger towards their military leaders. Signalman Gerald Murray wrote:

Doleful the day and foul the fate
That left us to Rommel a hookless bait,
Reducing us to the useless state
of a thousand prisoners in Bardia.³⁵

The fishing imagery conjured by Murray detailed his view that the men were ill-equipped and underprepared to combat the German troops. He suggested that the Allied commanders had sacrificed his group to distract the German forces. As the POWs above mentioned, Murray found solace in the fact that he was not alone in his predicament; instead, he was one of 'a thousand prisoners in Bardia.'³⁶ This

³³ Peter Winter, *Free Lodgings: The true story of a Kiwi soldier's amazing bid for freedom* (Auckland: Reed Books, 1993), p. 9.

³⁴ Tony Vercoe, *Yesterdays Drums: Echoes from the Wasteland of War* (Wellington: Steele Roberts Ltd, 2001), p. 100.

³⁵ Gerald Murray, 'A Thousand Prisoners of Bardia', 12 December 1941, MS-Papers-10877, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

³⁶ Murray, 'A Thousand Prisoners of Bardia', 12 December 1941.

display of group identity, even though it was forced on them, highlighted how the men replayed their war experiences.



Figure 1.2. New Zealand troops surrendering at Ruweisat Ridge, Egypt.³⁷

Corporal Neville Lodge's illustration of his capture highlights the foreboding nature of transitioning from soldiers to captives. Lodge and his fellow soldier were portrayed as helpless as they were overrun by better equipped German troops. It was noteworthy that Lodge made a point to show the Germans in their armoured vehicles, while he was on foot. This portrayal highlighted how many POWs felt that they were ill-equipped for combat.

³⁷ Lodge, Neville Sidney, 1918-1989. Capture at Ruweisat Ridge, 15 July 1942 - Sketch by Neville Lodge. New Zealand. Department of Internal Affairs. War History Branch: Photographs relating to World War 1914-1918, World War 1939-1945, occupation of Japan, Korean War, and Malayan Emergency. Ref: DA-00226. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22723440>.

Historian Allan Megill analysed the relationship between memory and identity, and an individual's ability to construct their self.³⁸ Megill explored the fluidity of identity, particularly how people place designations upon themselves. He contended that personal identity was deeply impacted by traumatic events when the individual felt threatened or uncertain.³⁹ In order to reclaim aspects of their identity, people used memories as a 'stabilizer of and justification for the self-designations that people claim.'⁴⁰ This argument is not dissimilar to the POWs' efforts to absolve themselves of blame. Rather than focusing on their current predicament as prisoners, the men looked to the past and reinforced their prior identities as soldiers. By supporting the idea that they were not to blame for defeat, POWs reclaimed aspects of their dignity, and a distinct identity began to emerge.

While physical and mental escapes will be examined in later chapters, it is important to note the initial attempts to resist captivity. Once the shock of capture and the shame associated with defeat dissipated, POWs made futile attempts to physically escape their captivity. Captain J.D. Gerard contended that these escape attempts were 'seldom successful; yet they were persisted in because the prisoner longed for freedom and because such attempts were their only means of engaging the enemy.'⁴¹ The ability of the men to combat their enemy, even if it was only by brief escapes, allowed POWs to enjoy moments of victory over their captors. Corporal John Broad recalled that after his capture at El Alamein he could not rest until he had at least attempted to escape, noting that if he stayed idle 'even my manhood itself would be taken away from me.'⁴² The stimulation that thinking about freedom provided POWs cannot be overstated. In their temporary camps, the men were held in spaces that they detached from, and they thus could not fully reclaim their identities. Even if it was just fantasy, the idea that freedom was obtainable if one mustered the courage and guile to escape was comforting. Vercoe argued that even in their lowest moments, escaping was 'never out of our

³⁸ Allan Megill, 'History, Memory, Identity', *History of the Human Sciences*, 11 (1998), pp. 37-62.

³⁹ Megill, p. 42.

⁴⁰ Megill, p. 42.

⁴¹ J.D. Gerard, *Unwilling Guests* (Wellington: Reed, 1945), p. 11.

⁴² John Evelyn Broad, *Poor People Poor Us* (Wellington: H. Tombs, 1945), p. 22.

thoughts', though illness made it impossible for most to 'contemplate it seriously.'⁴³ Private Robert Campbell offered another reason for escaping, noting that 'we were doing something to try to get back at them' for the poor camp conditions.⁴⁴

In their memoirs, POWs often noted the many unsuccessful escape attempts during this early stage of captivity. While these accounts provided an insight into the men's willingness to continue the fight against the enemy, Corporal Ian Millar's account was more poignant, because he reflected on why his group was less willing to escape after they were captured in Sidi Azeiz, Libya. He recalled that:

I find it easy now to look back and wonder whether we had enough determination, but then I realise that, as was proved to me so many times afterwards, when you are truly thirsty or hungry, you are a different person. In addition of course, although we may not have been fully aware of it at the time, we were all suffering a very severe blow to our morale by being taken prisoner.⁴⁵

Millar's statement that the transition from soldier to captive was disorienting, and that it essentially made him a different person adds weight to this thesis' arguments that the POW experience has been romanticised in New Zealand histories. Rather than a narrative dominated by escape, many POWs were left despondent after their capture, with little inclination to escape. This thesis develops these accounts by arguing that the spaces that POWs inhabited were central to their feelings of identity and isolation.

The lack of successful escapes and the continually depressing state of camp life diminished the POWs' resolve to escape. Riddiford remembered that the apathy related to escapes was contagious, and after thinking enthusiastically about

⁴³ Vercoe, p. 103.

⁴⁴ Hutching, p. 90.

⁴⁵ I.G.S. Millar, *A Long Walk: A Young Soldier's Escape from PoW through North Italy and Yugoslavia* (Auckland: Estate I.G.S. Millar, c1994), p. 3.

escaping he ‘began to shirk from the idea of embarking on a lone venture and to doubt whether the majority could after all be wrong.’⁴⁶ The collective feeling about sticking together as a group may have contributed to fewer escape attempts during those early weeks of captivity, but it also allowed men to stay together and establish a common identity. POWs became insistent that they were not at fault and that they were unashamed of their efforts on the battlefield. This shared view allowed them to believe in themselves again, shown by their discussions about escapes and the possibility of being recaptured by friendly forces.

In their depressed state and encaged in unfamiliar spaces, POWs struggled with their identities. They had fought and lost, they wondered if their masculinity would be questioned back home, and they were subject to their captors’ every whim. However, in these early stages of captivity, POWs escaped their physical desolation by retreating to the mental space of fantasy. Here, POWs reassured one another by stressing the strength of the Allied forces. Men discussed their eventual release as if it was only a matter of when, not if. Hogg remembered that the POWs ‘talked about and lived in the hope that our forces would liberate us at any time.’⁴⁷ Private John Parfitt recalled believing that ‘the Allies might be here tomorrow or the next day’.⁴⁸ Winter furthered this belief and explained why fantasy and hope were important to maintaining morale in the camps by stating that:

Some of us believed that the retaking of Crete was imminent, while others declared that the end of Hitler’s regime was at hand.

Extraordinarily, all of us took it for granted that release was only a matter of months away. I think it was some sort of innate defence mechanism: we did not want to cope with the alternatives.⁴⁹

Even though there were POWs who believed that there was a realistic possibility of being recaptured, many others shared the view of Winter, that it was a coping mechanism without substance. Warrant Officer R.H. Thomson recalled that on

⁴⁶ Riddiford, p. 21.

⁴⁷ Hogg, p. 47.

⁴⁸ Hutching, p. 190.

⁴⁹ Winter, p. 11.

Crete the POWs did not believe 'that the British Navy was within hundreds of miles, but a spectacular last minute rescue was a nice dream that dulled our despairing misery a bit and kept us a little occupied.'⁵⁰

Mental escape and the reinforcement of hope provided reassurance to the POWs that the war was still continuing and that victory was possible. Boasting about the Allies' strength allowed the men to continue the fight and keep aspects of their masculinity. It was necessary for their sanity to believe that one day the tables would be turned, and they would hold the power over their captors. Murray eloquently described this hope through poetry:

For the day shall come, as sure as the sun
When the diffident Ito, the race-proud Hun,
From encompassing armies unable to run,
Must bow to the prisoners of Bardia.⁵¹

Murray's poem suggested that his group found comfort in imagining their eventual release. In this imagined future, the POWs regained their power and were able to use it to imprison their enemy. Murray also revealed how POWs viewed their Italian and German captors differently. The Italians were portrayed as inferior and insecure compared to the proud Germans. These national stereotypes showed how the POWs grudgingly respected the Germans, but had little sympathy for the Italians. However, Murray used nicknames to refer to both Italians and Germans, which ridiculed them as inferior and uncivilised.

Although mental escapes allowed moments of fantasy where POWs envisioned their eventual release, the reality of the dire situation was not lost on them. This awareness was especially apparent as POWs were transferred from transit camps to permanent facilities in Italy. Arthur Coe noted that believing in the strength of the British navy could not diminish the 'feeling of hopelessness', and 'one became cynical when rumours were spread that British warships would storm into

⁵⁰ R.H. Thomson, *Captive Kiwi* (Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs Limited, 1964), p. 37.

⁵¹ Murray, 'A Thousand Prisoners of Bardia', 12 December 1941.

the Bay and rescue us.’⁵² Hargest remembered that the continual movement had broken his will, and when it was time for him to transfer to Italy he felt ‘no excitement, not even fear. I had been so overwhelmed by my capture that no new experience could appal me, and I suppose that went for my comrades, too.’⁵³

Their unfamiliar surroundings compounded their loss of control and individual freedom. These physical spaces were desolate and foreign; a distinct lack of common reference points such as landmarks or buildings contributed to an unwelcome atmosphere where frustration overwhelmed many. The lack of belonging to these spaces further stripped the POWs of their former soldierly identities and left them despondent. Hogg remembered that the first night was spent ‘herded together in the open desert.’⁵⁴ Many POWs experienced nights in the open air of the North Africa desert, but upon arrival at their transition camps, conditions barely improved. Private Ernest Clarke noted that the camp at Bari was ‘nothing but a mudbath. Shelter was from groundsheets erected to make long bivouacs; these had done their dash as waterproof sheeting so a touch would cause a leak.’⁵⁵ Similarly, Scott remembered that the transit camp at Daba ‘was no more than a piece of desert enclosed by barbed wire.’⁵⁶ In the following weeks, Scott was moved to the camp at Benghazi, where the conditions were basic at best, and many New Zealand POWs suffered the harsh conditions. Scott recalled that Benghazi was jokingly referred to as an “oasis” ... but it couldn’t have differed more from the picture that word had always conjured up in my mind.’⁵⁷

⁵² Coe, p. 9.

⁵³ Hargest, p. 33.

⁵⁴ Hogg, p. 47.

⁵⁵ Ernest Clarke, *Over the Fence is Out* (Papakura: E. Clarke, 1987), p. 31.

⁵⁶ Scott, p. 38.

⁵⁷ Scott, p. 40.

Similar to Scott, Millar was taken to Benghazi, where he remembered:

This camp was truly a terrible place, almost a nightmare. There were something like thirty thousand prisoners, most having been taken when Tobruck [*sic*] fell.... It was a horrible sight to see all these men pacing about inside the several small compounds like so many restless tigers. It was a place of survival of the fittest, of frequent fights, of lawlessness and of filthy living conditions. Unless one stood constantly on guard over one's few possessions, they would soon be stolen.⁵⁸

Millar's statement was a disturbing account of life in these transit camps. After the order and camaraderie of their soldierly lives, POWs were confronted by a dystopian space. Millar noted the constant fighting and instances of theft. The lawlessness and lack of supplies forced men to revert back to their primal instincts of survival. In this Darwinian environment, POWs were reduced to individuals who prioritised their own well-being over the needs of the group. Millar's description of the men as 'restless tigers' implied a descent into a more animalistic state. The language used by Millar suggested that the prison camp came to be seen as a zoo, and the prisoners as caged beasts. Unlike some of the other examples which have emphasised the men's impotence in defeat, the zoo imagery conjured a sense of the men's lingering power.

⁵⁸ Millar, p. 7.



Figure 1.3. Photograph of Benghazi POW camp.⁵⁹

Figure 1.3. illustrates that these initial POW camps lacked physical structures that the men could associate with. In this situation, it was clear that the POWs were forced to erect simple living quarters, but the compound remained basic and the men's lack of control is highlighted by the dominance of the natural landscape, especially the trees. The lack of familiar surroundings made the transition from soldier to prisoner difficult, because their living situation reflected their uncertain future. Men were not interested in investing in their camp, because they were aware that their stay was temporary and that they would eventually be moved to Italy or Germany.

As mentioned in the Introduction, Doctor Michael Godkin's theory of how space influences identity construction was applicable to the experience of being taken captive. Godkin argued that without a sense of belonging to a space, people felt

⁵⁹ Steward, L, fl 1942. Prisoner of war camp 116 (Palm Tree), Benghazi, Libya. New Zealand. Department of Internal Affairs. War History Branch: Photographs relating to World War 1914-1918, World War 1939-1945, occupation of Japan, Korean War, and Malayan Emergency. Ref: DA-10889. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22327820>.

alienated, and self-doubts became increasingly more debilitating.⁶⁰ The POWs felt no sense of security in their spaces, because many transit camps lacked the physical structures that they could shape into their own environment. Godkin contended that without a connection to a space, individuals often feel threatened and that this fear conflicted with their personal identity.⁶¹ The disempowerment that soldiers faced as they transitioned to captives was amplified by their inability to shape or connect with their physical space. Lance Sergeant George Lochhead recalled that their surroundings made them feel ‘like cattle – put into a big pen with a strand of barbed wire around it, and guards, for that day and night.’⁶² Again, the allusion to the POWs as livestock was telling of their agency during these early stages of captivity. The men were disempowered to the point that they felt no belonging to their physical space, and they made little attempt to connect to it, referring to their surroundings as pens or enclosures.

The lack of activities and routine added to the POWs’ sense of non-belonging to these physical spaces. At Benghazi, Private Alf Rawlings tried to find solace in religion, but even with this previously pleasurable experience, ‘The days were long, food was scarce, and the future looked bleak.’⁶³ Similarly, Winter tried to escape his unfamiliar physical space by retreating into the Bible and other books. He argued that:

Reading matter was at a premium and the owner of a book was a lucky man. Hours were spent in negotiating swaps. I read the Bible, Old and New Testaments, from cover to cover, keeping a chapter ahead of my companions who were using it for toilet paper.⁶⁴

Winter revealed the different values POWs placed on items in the camp space. He suggested that books were a reminder of pre-war life and gave him an opportunity

⁶⁰ Michael A. Godkin, ‘Identity and Place: Clinical Applications Based on Notions of Rootedness and Uprootedness’, in *The Human Experience of Place*, ed. by Anne Buttimer and David Seamon (London: Croom Helm, 1980), p. 76.

⁶¹ Godkin, p. 75.

⁶² Hutching, p. 204.

⁶³ Alf Rawlings, *Diary of Life in a Stalag* (Timaru: Alf Rawlings, 1991), p. 17.

⁶⁴ Winter, p. 12.

to distract himself from the reality of his physical surroundings. Winter noted that books were invaluable, because they could be read, swapped and then re-read. However, other POWs viewed books as a means of improving their physical comfort. The impulse to burn books for fuel or use the pages as sanitary items indicated the deprivation that men faced in captivity.

While the later chapters explore how men fought the monotony of captivity, early reactions to captivity expressed a lack of desire to do anything. Broad remembered that camp conditions were suffocating and that ‘The drowsy numbness of barbed-wire-itis filled our brains, mocked us in the alternate flatulent period of amnesia and hateful and ill-remembered hours of consciousness.’⁶⁵ He suggested that many POWs were suffering from a sickness, ‘barbed-wire-itis’, which prevented them from participating in mental activities. Captain Bruce Robertson agreed that this idleness was sapping the men of their morale and identity, noting that ‘we spent practically all day on our bunks.’⁶⁶ This forced stasis meant that POWs had little choice but to brood over their unfortunate circumstances and fantasise about when they would be freed.

While the transit camps were confronting spaces where the POWs formed few connections, the movement to and from these camps was also distressing. After surrendering, prisoners were bound to the will of their enemy and were forced to move vast distances away from the front lines. Their mobility on these marches was dictated to them by their captors, and the lack of clear communication provided an environment where uncertainty flourished. Rawlings was captured in Egypt and remembered this uncertainty:

It is a depressing experience, to be one of long lines of prisoners,
dragging your feet for mile after mile, wondering when a halt will

⁶⁵ Broad, p. 33.

⁶⁶ Bruce Robertson, *For the Duration: 2NZEF Officer Bruce Robertson on Active Duty and ‘In the Bag’*, ed. by Rosanne Robertson (Wellington: Ngaio Press, 2010), p. 90.

be called. All the while trying to recover from the shock of being taken prisoner, and wondering what went wrong.⁶⁷

It was during these marches that men were confronted with the reality of their loss of freedom. The shock of recent battles no doubt contributed to this feeling of helplessness, but the lack of agency was particularly debilitating to one's sense of individuality. Winter noted that after being captured in the Sfakia valley, Crete, and forced to march to a transit camp, he 'felt ashamed and degraded. We were a bedraggled flock of shocked, exhausted and hungry men.'⁶⁸ This allusion to the men as a 'flock' of sheep is fitting, because their every movement was dictated to them by their captors. When retelling their experiences, POWs often used animal imagery to highlight their lack of freedom. Private L.J. Read remembered that while being transported to Benghazi, his group

slept out in the cold night air at various holding sites established by the Italians for that purpose. Arriving at one of these in the dark, we were herded into a paddock and just had to lie down where we could – luckily, I found the place I had chosen was one of the few that was clean and free from human filth.⁶⁹

These early stages of captivity were unorganised, the lack of physical structures or bedding reduced the men to an almost primal state. Prisoners lost their individuality, they associated their actions as part of a mindless group rather than their own decisions. Gerard went further when he described that in their depressed state, walking became an 'automatic function.'⁷⁰ Captivity had reduced him to an automaton with little or no control over his actions.

Many POWs suffered from the extreme conditions they faced while being transported from the battlefield to transit camps. Millar, who was captured at El

⁶⁷ Rawlings, p. 16.

⁶⁸ Winter, p. 7.

⁶⁹ L.J. Read, *My Interesting Four Years: 1940-1944*, 1999.1231, The Kippenberger Military Archive, Waiouru, New Zealand, p. 13.

⁷⁰ Gerard, p. 13.

Alamein, Egypt, remembered that his group's primary concern was obtaining adequate water. Millar recalled that when they stopped for rest:

Many times men would imagine that they saw trucks coming across the desert with water for us; they would call this out causing everyone to spring up only to find it was a dream. It was one of the most unhappy days of my life.⁷¹

As Millar suggested, the lack of supplies compounded the shock of captivity. Rumours of food and water deliveries spread false hope among the POWs. The wait for these supplies was agonising, and contributed to the men's uncertain situation. Still, even against their better judgement, POWs imagined that supplies were imminent, because it was better than believing the alternative, that they were forgotten.

In addition to the lack of supplies, Millar noted that his column of POWs remained dangerously close to the front lines for some time. He remembered instances when Allied aircraft bombed German positions close to where they were being held:

For us sitting out in the open desert, it was a very unhappy experience. Of course a number of prisoners took fright, but really the only thing we could do was lie as close as possible to Mother Earth and cover our heads with our tin-hats as we prayed.⁷²

It was revealing that when the situation became dangerous, Millar's group sought safety in prayer and by making themselves smaller targets. Millar suggested that in the openness of the desert the POWs found refuge in grounding themselves as close as they could to the earth in order to find a small modicum of protection. The personification of the earth as 'Mother' is evocative of a desperate desire for nurture and rescue and speaks of the POWs' sense of childlike helplessness.

⁷¹ Millar, p. 4.

⁷² Millar, p. 2.

The futility of their situation and these mindless marches angered Robertson, who desperately wanted to retain his identity as a fighting man. While on a forced march, Robertson remembered ‘Something knocked against my leg, a grenade I was carrying in my shorts pocket. I wanted to ram it down someone’s throat and pull the pin, instead I dropped it in the sand.’⁷³ His acceptance of becoming a POW was confronting, and as many others would soon experience, it would provide ample time for reflection and self-pity.

The constant forced movement, or at least the threat of moving, hindered the men’s ability to establish routines and connections with their spaces. Guards continually disoriented prisoners by routinely moving them to different camps. Thomson recalled that his guards repeatedly enticed their movements by promising that ‘the camp was always only another three more kilometres, and there were rations round every next corner.’⁷⁴ Captain John Borrie, a medical doctor assigned to the troops, opined that despite the POWs’ monotonous existence, ‘the only constant was change.’⁷⁵ Gerontologist Graham Rowles argued that when people were faced with limited mobility and disempowerment, they tended to show ‘growing concern for remaining in secure and familiar settings.’⁷⁶ The inability to provide the men with certainty and a fixed environment invariably created a space with which the POWs were unable to connect. Without physical spaces that they could claim as their own, the POWs struggled to comprehend their situation, and this confusion deeply affected their identities. In the latter stages of the POW experience, they reconstructed elements of their home lives as a reminder of happier times, but in the initial weeks and months of captivity, little effort was made to reclaim this aspect of their identity because of the lack of a secure physical space.

⁷³ Robertson, p. 72.

⁷⁴ Thomson, p. 16.

⁷⁵ John Borrie, *Despite Captivity: A Doctor’s Life as Prisoner of War* (New Zealand: Whitcoulls Limited, 1975), p. 30.

⁷⁶ Graham D. Rowles, ‘Toward a Geography of Growing Old’, in *The Human Experience of Place*, ed. by Anne Buttner and David Seamon (London: Croom Helm, 1980), p. 56.

The constant movement between camps also affected the military structure that previously organised the men. POWs were now faced with a situation where the extent to which they were bound by rank and hierarchy was unclear. Riddiford remembered the disorienting feeling that the blurred command structure created in these spaces:

I felt sick at the pit of my stomach, lonely and dazed.... the Major whose orders I had been accustomed to obeying seemed no longer to be a Major. The authority with which the Army had clothed him had been torn away and, like me, he was now a mere individual trying to adjust himself to a strange environment.⁷⁷

It is evident that the shock of capture and the foreign spaces that the POWs inhabited during these early weeks and months of imprisonment provided an environment that was deeply dislocating. Riddiford noted how the lack of command structures left men isolated and fending for themselves. In these moments, there was ample time for reflection, which the POWs used to despair at their predicament. Some tried to escape their barren physical space by retreating into mental activities, where they still had limited agency. However, defeat still played heavily on these men's minds, and most were overwhelmed with self-pity.

Self-pity was prevalent in the camp space, because men had entered the conflict expecting to be victorious. However, they now found themselves in an unforeseen predicament, and they found it difficult to identify with their previous notions of soldierly ideals. In a study of the experiences of Australian nurse POWs, Christina Twomey explored the concept of masculinity on the battlefield. She contended that:

The language of the battlefield, of the front, is saturated with the grammar of masculinity: a concern with manhood, manliness, virility and brotherhood structures many accounts of combat. The implicit contrast here, the other half of the equation, is the 'home front', a supposedly more feminine world where there is an

⁷⁷ Riddiford, p. 13.

atmosphere of nurture for those who have returned and an environment supportive of the main war effort.⁷⁸

Although these fixed gender spheres represent a simplistic understanding of social structures, they became complicated when men transitioned from soldiers to captives. Twomey argued that:

The inhabitants of prison camps were no longer at the 'front' – the fighting was over, the inmates of the camp had been defeated – but nor were they on the 'home front'; there was no nurture or refuge there, it was a prison controlled by one's military enemy and the occupants were a long way from home.⁷⁹

Twomey's suggestion that these spaces were foreign and remote fits well with this thesis' argument about how the camp space affected the POW experience. The men's initial capture was a disorientating time, during which they endured physical and mental hardships. Compounding this confronting experience was the camp itself, its confines were a physical representation of the men's failure on the battlefield, and their remoteness. The North African transit camps where POWs were imprisoned were particularly foreboding, because many men lacked the ability to communicate with the world beyond the wire.

Movement between the battlefield and transit camps also led to increased interactions among guards, prisoners and civilians. These encounters added another level of disorientation, because the POWs saw people and lifestyles that differed from their own. Geographers Peter Jackson and Jan Penrose examined the relationship between race and identity in *Constructions of Race, Place and Nation*.⁸⁰ Jackson and Penrose contended that encounters between different cultures were 'among the most powerful sources of human identity'.⁸¹ They argued that, when combined with social Darwinism, 'human achievement, social

⁷⁸ Christina Twomey, 'Australian Nurse POWs: Gender, War and Captivity', *Australian Historical Studies*, 36, 124 (2004), p. 262.

⁷⁹ Twomey, p. 262.

⁸⁰ *Constructions of Race, Place and Nation*, ed. by Peter Jackson and Jan Penrose (London: UCL Press Limited, 1993).

⁸¹ Jackson and Penrose, p. 1.

development and “progress” all became entangled with biological notions about classification, selection and hierarchy’.⁸² These perceptions of race affected how people viewed one another, as well as their self-reflections. In regards to New Zealand POWs, their perspectives on Germans differed greatly; to some they were a respected foe, to others they were the hated enemy.

The differences between the guards and the captives provided a hostile environment for some POWs, who were naturally downtrodden and pitiful. Winter described the state of the Germans upon his capture, noting that

it was natural that they were as happy as we were downcast, but their air of wellbeing rubbed salt into our spiritual wounds. It was not hard to hate our captors. The adage ‘a good German is a dead one’ became a theme of life for a prisoner.⁸³

Elworthy faced similar circumstances, remembering that:

We formed a sorry party. There were men limping, men being half carried, and men, like me, with sticks and pieces of wood in each hand, shuffling along at a snail’s pace. Beside us were the Germans, clean, well dressed, and well fed.⁸⁴

The stark contrast between the defeated Allies and the victorious Axis troops was telling. The images that POWs remembered highlighted their struggle in transitioning from soldier to captive. It was a process that struck at their core, they had entered combat with courage and self-belief, in defeat they were stripped of those qualities and left as shells of themselves. Their poor physical and mental state was amplified when they saw the professionalism and strength of the Axis troops, and in particular the Germans. Moreover, the depressed state of the POWs emphasised the need to adjust quickly to their new surroundings, but the constant movement and unfamiliar environments proved too much for some to overcome. Eventually, POWs would reclaim aspects of their masculinity, but the initial

⁸² Jackson and Penrose, p. 4.

⁸³ Winter, p. 8.

⁸⁴ Elworthy, p. 115.

stages of captivity were confronting, especially when they compared their weak state to their captors' strength.

Although many POWs noted the strength and discipline of the Germans, they showed no such admiration for the Italians. Crowley explained that the Italians' behaviour after the fall of Greece was shameful and unsoldierly, 'To us the Italians smelled – we weren't used to the smell of garlic – and they seemed to be dirty people in adverse conditions. They were swines: they went into the villages and stole, vandalised things and raped the women.'⁸⁵ Crowley's reference to the Italians as swines highlighted his contempt toward them. It was also important that he noted the crimes they committed and that, as a POW, he was powerless to intervene. Crowley's inability to act was a confronting experience that struck at his masculinity. His self-worth was degraded further when he was marched to a transition camp at Corinth. Crowley remembered that the 'Italians spat on us. I recollected what they were like when we'd captured them in the Western Desert: cringing and whining. We didn't spit on them. Now these bastards were lining up and spitting on us.'⁸⁶ The Italians were derogatory toward Crowley's group, spitting on them when they had the opportunity. This disrespectful act led Crowley to despise the Italians, and reinforced his low opinion of them. Through these early cross-cultural encounters, New Zealand POWs reinforced their individual and collective identities. Crowley's statement, that he gave better treatment to Italian prisoners earlier in the war than what he received during his captivity, emphasised a common belief of the British Commonwealth's moral superiority over the Italians. These distinctions were central in portraying the enemy as the "other." Migration scholar Anne Kershen argued that cultural differences were central in developing identities, noting that 'Without an "other" to identify with or differ from, self-recognition would be impossible.'⁸⁷ This was the case for many New Zealand POWs, who often described the foreignness of their experience, and the people they were encountering.

⁸⁵ Millen, p. xiii.

⁸⁶ Millen, p. xiv.

⁸⁷ *A Question of Identity*, ed. by Anne J. Kershen (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1998), p. 2.

Many POWs recollected the hostile experiences they had with the general public. They remembered the demeaning parades they were forced to make through towns and the townsfolk who belittled and shamed them. Hogg noted that his group was marched through Tripoli where ‘the Libyan people threw things and spat upon us.’⁸⁸ The impoverished conditions and the hurtful actions of civilians and captors deeply diminished the POWs’ self-worth. In some ways they dehumanised them, with Hogg recalling that he ‘found it hard to accept that we were being treated like animals.’⁸⁹

Some POWs recalled that they received harsher treatment from Italians than the Germans, especially when it came to keeping personal belongings upon capture. Vercoe remembered that ‘everything was fair game to the Italian’, whereas the ‘German was more reasonable and simply handed back anything for which a plea of sentimental value was made.’⁹⁰ The retention of personal keepsakes helped to provide an element of comfort for POWs, a physical reminder of themselves and home; they also proved invaluable as objects to trade for food in the coming weeks, months and years. Borrie was thankful that his group were able to retain their belongings, noting that the POWs were ‘Holding tight to our few possessions’ and that even though the Germans spoke in a ‘strange guttural language. They seemed human, intelligent fellow, who could even smile.’⁹¹

National tension was present not only between captives and captors, but also POWs remembered the conflicts that arose between the Germans and Italians. Broad recalled that

the Germans did not mix with the Italians. They looked upon them with disdain and treated them as an inferior race. The Italians

⁸⁸ Hogg, p. 47.

⁸⁹ Hogg, p. 49.

⁹⁰ Vercoe, pp. 58-59.

⁹¹ Borrie, p. 12.

cringed to the Germans. They had no love for them though they seemed to acknowledge their superiority.⁹²

The superiority of the Germans over the Italians was apparent to the POWs, with Gerard contending that the Italians ‘in contrast to the Germans, [were] small and slovenly’ and that they had a tendency to ‘gloat over us.’⁹³ In another instance, Lance Bombardier Jim Henderson spent time in various field hospitals after being wounded at Sidi Rezegh, where he met wounded soldiers of various nationalities. He noted that he formed a friendship with a German over their disdain for Italian macaroni, noting that the ‘mutual rejection of this alien food was another bond between us. We exchanged smiles again.’⁹⁴

Although the experiences of New Zealand POWs in Europe did not involve the immense racial hatred that became synonymous with captive narratives from the Pacific, the way in which New Zealanders described their Italian guards, usually as inferior to themselves and the Germans, was infused with a sense of racial superiority. While studying Australian POWs in the Pacific, Australian historian Stephen Garton argued that ‘incarceration was doubly emasculating given the intense racial dimension of their plight: prisoners of a despised and supposedly inferior race.’⁹⁵ The shame associated with being detained by a perceived inferior race was evident in many New Zealand POW accounts, such as Henderson’s rejection of foreign food. In rare circumstances, New Zealand POWs remembered the discrimination that Māori POWs endured. At Benghazi, Broad recalled an event when a Māori soldier was punished for no apparent reason. He noted that a

Maori was unceremoniously bundled off the truck and marched away to the guard-house.... he was tied by the hands and feet and exposed to the overpowering rays of the sun for three days. Then

⁹² Broad, p. 21.

⁹³ Gerard, p. 14.

⁹⁴ Jim Henderson, *Gunner Inglorious* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 38.

⁹⁵ Stephen Garton, “‘Fit only for the Scrap Heap’: Rebuilding Returned Soldier Manhood in Australia after 1945”, *Gender & History*, 20, 1 (2008), p. 49.

he was scourged into insensibility and thrust back into the pen with us battered almost beyond recognition.⁹⁶

Broad revealed how the guards had physically and mentally destroyed a fellow soldier. The POWs were powerless as they witnessed the man change from a familiar soldier into an almost unrecognisable identity. When the punishment was over, the man was thrown into the pen with the other captives. This allusion to the men as animals showed how POWs lacked individual identities and were dehumanised by their imprisonment.

Difficulties relating to language arose between captors and captives, with Henderson recalling a humorous misunderstanding when the Italian guards were saying what he believed to be 'Kia Ora'. The familiar welcome reminded the POWs of home, and they believed that 'the Maori Battalion must have passed this way.'⁹⁷ However, the rare glimpse of familiarity was a mistranslation, with the POWs discovering that 'they were saying "Che ora?" (What is the time?).'⁹⁸ Still, for that brief moment the men remembered aspects of home that helped to differentiate New Zealand POWs from their captors and their allies.

Elworthy recalled that after his surrender, he was the ranking officer among his contingent. He had mixed feelings about continuing as an officer, but regarded it as his duty to guide the POWs. However, Elworthy's situation was complicated, because men of other nationalities had mixed into his group, and he noted 'When mixed nationalities were involved, every complaint had to be looked into, or the complainers would say you looked after your own people and not them.'⁹⁹ Men of all nationalities were usually critical of officers; this negativity was particularly hard on Elworthy, with him recalling that 'I hadn't yet hardened up enough to take the criticism and abuse without feeling I had failed them.'¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Broad, p. 34.

⁹⁷ Henderson, p. 45.

⁹⁸ Henderson, p. 45.

⁹⁹ Elworthy, p. 117.

¹⁰⁰ Elworthy, p. 118.

The above statements have shown that the initial capture phase of the POW experience broke the men's connection with the outside world and dashed their expectations of their wartime experience. The depression that the POWs felt after capture and the almost endless marching was debilitating, and many lost the will to continue struggling against their captors. Riddiford, who had previously been overwhelmed with the need to escape, recalled that when he was taken to Italy he was 'dazed and crushed; after so many setbacks I had no kick left.'¹⁰¹ Camp life would improve, but after months in transition camps, POWs were preoccupied with the hopelessness of their situation. They had been moved from camp to camp, disoriented and mistreated, and they lacked a group identity other than their suffering together. Vercoe recounted that while the constant movement gave hope to some POWs, the disastrous conditions and lack of physical structures stripped the men of a feeling of belonging to their space. He opined, optimistically, that maybe the next stop would be 'different, maybe better.'¹⁰²

Up to this point, this chapter has portrayed the POW experience in liminal terms. The men were constantly adjusting to new routines and spaces. They were no longer soldiers, but their fate as prisoners was uncertain. Some lived in hope that they would be recaptured, others were numb to what was happening to them. For the most part, prisoners did not establish strong connections with their camps in the initial stages of captivity. However, the accounts suggested that men began to come to terms with their captivity when they were moved to more permanent facilities in Italy. Vercoe noted his improved experience at Bari camp in Italy:

its real wooden barracks, double bunk units (one up, one down), washing facilities and latrines, offered relief: Physical rehabilitation was going to take time, but here was a small beginning towards self-respect, the rekindling of all the damped-down fires of the spirit, the reawakening of personality.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Riddiford, p. 27.

¹⁰² Vercoe, p. 104.

¹⁰³ Vercoe, p. 107.

Vercoe's statement revealed how improved camp conditions impacted the men's morale. In the transit camps in North Africa, the ability to shape their environment was limited. Survival was prioritised over making long-term adjustments to the camp space. However, in Italy the POWs entered camps that had elements of permanency. Instead of tents and make-shift shelters, the camps had wooden buildings and other amenities. In this space, POWs were able to exert their personalities and shape their area into a more comfortable environment.

Another reason why some POWs were wanting to move to permanent camps was because they associated these early camps with their transition from soldiers to captives. When it looked likely that his group would leave their transit camp in Corinth, MacDuff wrote in his diary:

We shall all be delighted to leave this camp of morbid memories,
because it is here that the first impact of our misfortune was felt,
and many of us have suffered prolonged moods of the most
abysmal glooms for the first time in our lives.¹⁰⁴

MacDuff suggested that life in these initial POW camps was confronting to the men. The camps were a constant reminder of their failure on the battlefield and the freedom they had lost. MacDuff revealed that he believed that the POWs could distance themselves from these bad memories when they moved camps. Therefore, moving to a new camp represented a fresh beginning and a break from their identity as defeated soldiers.

In many cases, POWs in North Africa were transported via transport ships to Italy. These journeys were perilous, and the conditions in the holds were horrendous. Thomson remembered that POWs were 'loaded in by the hundreds and had no room to stretch out and barely enough to sit.'¹⁰⁵ In Thomson's case, he was in charge of a contingent of New Zealanders and was thankful for the familiarity with those men because it 'would have been almost impossible to have

¹⁰⁴ MacDuff, 2 June 1941.

¹⁰⁵ Thomson, p. 36.

handled a mixed bunch under those conditions, with no one type being in sympathy with the outlook of any other.’¹⁰⁶ Compounding the poor conditions on the transport ships, Millar recalled that the ship’s crew often acted in ways which dehumanised the POWs. He noted that, ‘Many times members of the ship’s crew entertained themselves by dropping small pieces of bread down to starving prisoners, some of whom pounced upon and devoured the bread. It was a degrading sight.’¹⁰⁷ Millar’s account of life on the transport ships revealed how humiliating the experience was to the POWs. Descriptions of the guards treating the POWs like animals, dropping food down to the men and watching them fight for scraps, highlighted how dehumanising the journey was for the POWs. Millar noted how degrading this experience was, but the extreme conditions provided POWs little choice to survive.

Still, even in these restricted and humiliating spaces, POWs like Millar were optimistic that the worst aspects of their captivity were behind them. He remembered feeling good about leaving the camps in North Africa, stating that

we thought there was a good chance of our being recaptured by our Navy; we were happy to leave that hellish camp; if we landed in Italy, we would at least be going to a white man’s country where there would be sufficient to eat. Well, in our innocence that was what we thought then.¹⁰⁸

It was revealing that Millar imagined that the move from North Africa to Italy would enable the POWs to leave their foreign experience behind them and enjoy the familiarity of a European nation. He suggested that a return to what he deemed a civilised country would provide the POWs with the necessary food and comforts to endure their captivity. However, Millar noted that this expectation was naïve and that the POW experience was still confronting throughout his captivity.

¹⁰⁶ Thomson, p. 41.

¹⁰⁷ Millar, p. 9.

¹⁰⁸ Millar, p. 8.

Similarly, Private Jack Gallichan contrasted the deplorable conditions on his transport boat to the idyllic countryside he could see from deck:

In the warmth of today's sunshine Corinth appeared as a vision inviting us to rest and repose, as a vision of something we'd lost. From the background of green hills behind there seemed to drift assurances of friendship and of refuge. To linger there, to dream there, to forget all about the darkness, the dirt, and the suffering in the hold of this ship, that would have been Heaven to us.¹⁰⁹

Gallichan noted how prisoners hoped each stop would be their last. After being stuck in the depths of a ship's cargo holds, firm ground represented a warm, peaceful place where the men could forget their troubles. He suggested that he longed for the movement and uncertainty to stop, he wanted a place to call his own. Compared to the transport ships, in some ways, these permanent camps came to symbolise home.

In conclusion, this chapter highlighted the dislocation that POWs endured during the initial stages of their captivity. Daily life within transit camps was distressing, especially as the men were still shocked from battle. Their defeat raised questions about their identities, particularly as they transitioned from the masculine role of soldiers to the state of captive. In an attempt to combat this emasculating experience, POWs reinterpreted their capture and placed the blame for defeat outside themselves. Military commanders were blamed for sending them into a conflict without adequate planning and equipment. Absent from these battlefield retellings was the performance of the soldiers, with the POWs sternly believing they were a competent foe of the Germans. This air of superiority was clear through their interactions with Italian forces, who the New Zealand POWs believed to be far inferior to their fellow troops. During these encounters, POWs began to develop a collective identity based upon the stark differences between their defeated comrades and their victorious captors.

¹⁰⁹ Jack Gallichan, *Barbed Wire Days*, MS-Papers-8910-01, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 49.

To reclaim aspects of their masculinity, POWs idealised a scenario where they escaped their physical surrounds and re-joined the fighting. However, for many POWs these discussions were mere fantasies that helped to stave off the boredom and despair of captivity. But they played an important role in allowing men to experience feelings of self-worth and dignity again. Their willingness to combat the enemy provided an optimistic mental space where POWs spread rumours of Allied advances. The men reassured each other that their liberation was a possibility and that their war was not over yet.

The unfamiliar and confronting physical space that POWs inhabited during these initial stages of captivity provided a hostile and disorienting environment. POWs struggled to connect with their camps, many of which lacked physical structures and adequate facilities. Without distinct physical buildings, the men were unable to represent themselves as individuals. Instead, they were held in barren landscapes without the features of home to comfort them. Compounding this issue was the insistence by some of their captors that they hand over their personal belongings. The confiscation of an item which held sentimental value was an unwanted outcome of captivity and one which broke a POW's connection to his former life. Many POWs obtained books and set about escaping their physical deprivation by mental activities. These small pleasures helped to fill the days of monotony, but they proved insufficient to foster any semblance of a familiar environment in these foreign spaces.

The guards contributed to the dislocation that POWs felt by creating a physical and mental space where uncertainty was prevalent. POWs reflected on the insecurity that they experienced as they were constantly moved to transit camps. The frequent movement of POWs, especially in their state of shock, deeply hindered their ability to connect with their space. Without the security that these camps would house them for the foreseeable future, men failed to make improvements to their surroundings. Later camps featured many aspects of home life, but these early camps highlighted the POWs' struggle to understand their

situation. Many were too focused on where their next meal would come from to concern themselves with fostering a comfortable camp space.

Eventually, the men were transferred to permanent camps in Italy and Germany, and it was at this point that the realisation of a prolonged captivity struck the POWs. After experiencing months of deprivation, their transition from soldier to captive was completed. The men realised that the further they were moved into Axis territories, the less likely it was that they would be liberated or escape. Some men agonised over their predicament, but as the next chapters highlight, many POWs accepted their new surroundings and made efforts to implement elements of their pre-war lives. In doing so, they reinforced aspects of their identities that were stripped from them during the initial stages of captivity.

Chapter Two - Escaping the Wire

Readers are only interested in the adventure and thrill of escapes, not the humdrum routine or the psychological reasons of a P.o.W. existence.¹

Histories of the POW experience have been dominated by tales of daring escapes. This almost singular focus has resulted from the men's greater willingness to discuss the less confronting aspects of their imprisonment. As New Zealand Brigadier George Clifton stated in the opening passage, prisoners were reluctant to revisit unpleasant memories of captivity. In the men's post-war accounts, describing the planning and execution of escapes added levity to what was a bleak, monotonous period of their lives. While this thesis is critical of the dominance of escape narratives, these aggressive forms of resistance allowed POWs to cultivate a more soldierly identity; they were active rather than passive, captured but not defeated. Escaping came to symbolise their resistance to captivity and the spaces they were forced to inhabit. This chapter argues that these outward displays of resistance reflected the men's hopes that through their actions they could overcome their captivity. It begins the middle section of this thesis which emphasises the outward and internal ways the prisoners resisted their situation.

While increased scholarly interest in the POW experience has led to more refined studies of confinement, academics have neglected the complexities of escapes. Without academic analysis, escape narratives are still dominated by popular histories and media representations. Historian Simon MacKenzie stated that these glamorised depictions oversimplify and distort the general European POW experience, resulting in what he termed the 'Colditz Myth'.² A similar occurrence has happened in New Zealand studies, such as those by Matthew Wright, which

¹ George Clifton, *The Happy Hunted* (London: Cassell & Co. Ltd, 1952), p. 255.

² S.P. MacKenzie, *The Colditz Myth: British and Commonwealth Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 2.

often emphasised the bravery and patriotism of escapees.³ Wright remained convinced that imprisonment ‘did not mean giving up the fight, and in the process many [POWs] found strengths they did not know they possessed.’⁴ While some prisoners held the view that it was their duty to escape, other escapees just wanted a distraction. This chapter provides a sophisticated analysis of escapes, it emphasises the complex reasons why men wanted to escape and how resisting authority helped them cope with captivity.

After analysing the escape attempts of New Zealand POWs, three main points stand out. First, there were various reasons for escaping, but many memoirists have focused on their need to fulfil a sense of duty. Continuingly undermining the enemy war effort allowed POWs to achieve a sense of self-worth. Second, there were POWs who escaped for the sake of escaping. Many felt the need to inject adventure and chance into a routine existence. Escapes, or even dreaming of escaping, provided an interruption from uniform behaviour. Finally, escapes were not solitary pursuits; men formed groups to aid their attempts. However, these groups created hierarchies in which keen escapees criticised other POWs for their unwillingness to participate in escapes. By exploring these three points, this chapter provides a deeper understanding of the men’s physical escape narratives.

It is hard to determine how common escape attempts were, and how these efforts were viewed within the camp space because POWs rarely noted escapes in their diaries. It was only in the safety of post-captivity life that escapes became the focus of the POW narrative. However, these interpretations were targeted at a wider reading audience and often reflected a need to add excitement and heroism into the POW experience. Even accounts from men who were limited in their escape participation tended to justify why they were not more involved in escapes. Private John Bettle, who helped at his camp’s medical facility in Italy, stated that:

³ Matthew Wright, *Escape!: Kiwi POWs on the run in World War II* (Auckland: Random House, 2006); *Behind Enemy Lines: Kiwi Freedom Fighters in WWII*, ed. by Matthew Wright (Auckland: Random House, 2010).

⁴ Wright, *Escape!*, p. 8.

I had also been out on a Working Party and this was actually very beneficial. 'Barbed wire fever' is one of the PoW's worst enemies and it was good to get away from the camp for a short time.

Thoughts of escape? No. I was helping to look after patients and that was that.⁵

Bettle reasoned that he was unable to escape because he had a greater responsibility to help his patients. Although many POWs had similar obligations which prevented them from escaping, it was revealing that Bettle felt the need to validate his stance. It is an intriguing position because it suggests POWs struggled to share their experiences with the public. As mentioned in this thesis' introduction, Australian historian Peter Monteath argued that years of captivity did not fit within the 'Anzac Myth', thus it became necessary for POWs to frame their captivity within a wider experience.⁶ Rather than describing the mental anguish of imprisonment, memoirists merged their captive and soldierly identities by emphasising escape attempts.

Although there were accounts from POWs who were unwilling to escape, most memoirs were written by keen escapees. These accounts suggested that escapees regarded those reluctant to escape unfavourably. Clifton contrasted opposing views toward escape by describing two of his fellow POWs at P.G. 29 near Piacenza, Italy. He noted that:

Hil was a rapid escaper, prowling round like a caged wolf, examining every potential means, however fantastic, of getting out. On the other hand, Bob could be placed in the 'keeper' group; keep fit, keep sane, keep comfortable; and make the full use of the enforced leisure on education and hobbies. For non-Regular officers, whose post-war livelihood must be kept steadily in view, the 'keeper' attitude had much in its favour. The odds against escaping, not only from a prison camp but also from Italy as well,

⁵ John Bettle with Colin Amodeo, *Taking Life as it Comes: A Medical Unit Soldier's Story* (Christchurch: John Bettle, 1997), p. 46.

⁶ Peter Monteath, *P.O.W.: Australian Prisoners of War in Hitler's Reich* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 2011), p. 430.

were very long indeed. Therefore why waste useful time mucking about digging tunnels or playing silly beggars, when, sooner or later, the plot invariably failed.⁷

Clifton's comparison of escapees to animals emphasised their need to be active, as well as their obsession with escaping. He noted how some men were compelled to try and escape at every opportunity, suggesting that their efforts fulfilled an animalistic need to be free. Importantly, rather than disapproving of those who were unwilling to escape, he proposed that they were resisting captivity in a different way. When escapes seemed impossible, participating in leisure activities demonstrated a passive, and sometimes more effective, resistance to camp authority.

In a more disparaging description of non-escapees, Lieutenant W.B. Thomas wrote in his memoir that:

The general attitude among the prisoners towards escape was apathetic. There had been practically no training for the emergency of capture, and the majority of prisoners gave way to the strange selfish lassitude which was a feature of all prison camps. The days, the weeks, the months dragged slowly by.⁸

Thomas noted that POWs were unprepared for captivity, with many unable to overcome the strangeness of their situation. Rather than engaging the enemy through escapes, some POWs tried to make the best of their captivity. In these instances, waiting out the war was a more realistic option for many POWs who hoped to return home safely. Keen escapees, like Thomas, were disturbed by this different perspective on captivity. The indifference of many POWs to escape meant that those who participated in escapes often isolated their activities from the wider prison population. Thomas remembered that it was best to speak about escapes only with those who shared a similar perspective.⁹

⁷ Clifton, p. 256.

⁸ W.B. 'Sandy' Thomas, *Dare to be Free: One of the Greatest True Stories of World War II* (Hororata: Dryden Press, 2001), p. 49.

⁹ Thomas, p. 50.

Many POWs framed their escapes around a narrative of continuing the fight against the enemy. Their accounts revealed how they resisted their captors, and how they refused to accept their captivity. In many ways, rediscovering their soldierly identities allowed keen escapees to separate themselves from those men who accepted their position as prisoners. Historian Heather Jones explored how POWs used escapes to express their individuality in World War One.¹⁰ Jones noted that ‘aspiring to escape, allowed prisoners, confined in the domesticated, uniformly male, home front camp to project a sense of agency and masculinity.’¹¹ Moreover, she argued that the oppression and uniformity of captivity led to many POWs becoming anonymous. It was ‘only through the escape aspiration or attempt could a real sense of personal agency and difference be regained.’¹² Therefore, escapes enabled men to reposition themselves, not as mindless captives, but as active agents who were willing and able to engage with the enemy. Not only were escapes a physical attempt to leave the camp confines, but also they were a coping mechanism which reinforced the POWs’ resistance to confinement.

When discussing escapes, engaging the enemy became a dominant theme throughout the POWs’ accounts. Captain J.D. Gerard noted that his group realised that escapes were unlikely to be successful, ‘yet they were persisted in because the prisoner longed for freedom and because such attempts were their only means of engaging the enemy.’¹³ Likewise, Sergeant Pilot Jack Rae recalled how his group believed escaping their camp, Stalag Luft III, could impact the enemy’s war effort. Rae stated:

This was a place where we could be a continuous problem to the enemy, forcing them to retain large forces of men to guard us and so strain their resources. These were the main objectives in the PoW camps of Sagan and many other places. It was well known

¹⁰ Heather Jones, ‘A Missing Paradigm? Military Captivity and the Prisoner of War, 1914-18’, *Immigrants & Minorities: Historical Studies in Ethnicity, Migration and Diaspora*, 26, 1-2 (2008), pp. 19-48.

¹¹ Jones, p. 25.

¹² Jones, p. 25.

¹³ J.D. Gerard, *Unwilling Guests* (Wellington: Reed, 1945), p. 11.

that the chances of a successful escape back to our own side were remote in the extreme but to continue trying to escape was an accepted duty for a large number of prisoners.¹⁴

Rae noted how POWs were aware that their dreams of escaping and returning home had to be subdued. The prospect of a complete break from captivity was unlikely; instead, escapes were brief interruptions to the men's monotonous existence. It was common for POWs who escaped the camp to be recaptured in the following days or weeks. Still, POWs were elated that they were engaging the enemy again. Rather than passively accepting their captivity, trying to escape the camp confines reminded the POWs that they were capable of physical activity. This movement helped to restore an aspect of agency to the men; while escaping, men had control of their lives again.

Failed escape attempts did little to deter Major C.N. Armstrong's willingness to disrupt the enemy. For his continued disobedience, Armstrong was moved to P.G. 5, a stricter camp for escapees near Genoa, Italy. While among those who shared similar feelings toward escaping, he remembered:

I felt then, and my feelings were confirmed as I came to know my fellow prisoners, that the escapees do not lose by their attempts, they gain. What they lose in physical and material comfort, they gain in self respect, in the knowledge that they have done their duty and in the satisfaction that, although they are physical prisoners, they have not accepted or lain down under that status to captors whom they despise. They feel that to some extent they have justified themselves in their own eyes and in the eyes of their people and their regiments.¹⁵

For Armstrong, escape attempts were opportunities to express his nonconformity to prison authorities. He resisted the label of prisoner; instead, he fashioned

¹⁴ Jack Rae, *Kiwi Spitfire Ace: A Gripping World War II Story of Action, Captivity and Freedom* (London: Grub Street, 2001), p. 117.

¹⁵ C.N. Armstrong, *A Life without Ladies* (Christchurch: Whitcombe & Tombs Limited, 1947), p. 134.

himself as a rogue agent causing harm to the enemy's war effort. His insistence that these actions justified his war experience emphasised how escapees struggled with their captivity. Whether it was out of a sense of duty or a need to reduce the shame of being captured, some prisoners felt compelled to disrupt the enemy.

While most escapes had little chance of success, Lieutenant Daniel Riddiford remembered the need to disrupt the enemy during his time in Italy:

It was nonetheless worthwhile to attempt to escape as it led to large numbers of troops being deployed to search the country, more guards were detailed to guard POW camps and no one can estimate how many typewriters were worn out in typing reports, how many Generals' lives were shortened by apoplexy or how many demoralising rumours circulated through Italy about the desperate character of the *Inglesi*, for the flap in Italy after an escape was just incredible.¹⁶

Likewise, Flight Lieutenant Owen Foster recalled his time at Stalag Luft III, a camp for air force personnel near Sagan, Silesia, where he worked on the tunnels used during the Great Escape:

Before we were settled in we were called before the senior British Officer in the camp and told the camp rules. The most important thing we were told was that just because we were P.O.W.'s that didn't mean our fighting against the enemy was finished as our job now was to make it difficult for the guards to look after us. The more guards we had made it fewer soldiers to go to the front.¹⁷

These statements revealed that disrupting the enemy was a common reason for POWs to escape. Escapees revelled in the knowledge that they were drawing resources away from the battlefields. Although these activities may have disrupted

¹⁶ Daniel Riddiford MC, *Committed to Escape: A New Zealand Soldier's Story* (Martinborough: Ruamahanga Press Ltd, 2004), p. 47.

¹⁷ Owen Foster, Unpublished Manuscript, MS-Papers-8223, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 47.

the enemy, there is insufficient evidence to suggest that they impacted the war. Camp authorities viewed escape attempts as a nuisance, rather than an impending disaster. The accounts did not describe the significant rebuilding of camps to tighten security; instead, POWs who were viewed as disruptive were simply moved to a different camp. Regardless, the POWs' belief that they were engaging the enemy allowed them to reclaim some agency and improved their self-esteem. Their resistance was a momentary break from routines and responsibilities.

Many POWs felt agony in captivity because they believed they had failed in their role as soldiers. POWs found it confronting to be reminded that men were risking their lives on the battlefield while they sat in their camps. Riddiford acknowledged that some POWs were more likely to take risks because they felt guilty about being taken prisoner. When detailing why he tried escaping, he noted that:

As for its dangers, they were not to be compared with those faced by an infantryman in the field. A war was on; I was ashamed to be out of it, and it made me feel better to be running risks which would in front line service be taken as a matter of course.¹⁸

Riddiford suggested that participating in escape attempts allowed him to reclaim his self-esteem. Escaping, and the disruption it caused for the enemy, was invigorating. Riddiford expressed his shame by comparing his relative comfort to the horrors that frontline troops were suffering. He noted how engaging the enemy and taking risks helped to lessen his feelings of guilt.

Similar to Riddiford, Warrant Officer R.H. Thomson recalled that escapes enabled POWs to express their resistance to captivity. He noted that he was 'continuously concerned with the need to get back to our side of the line and to get cracking as a soldier again.'¹⁹ Thomson went further, describing why he felt the need to escape:

¹⁸ Riddiford, p. 48.

¹⁹ R.H. Thomson, *Captive Kiwi* (Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs Limited, 1964), p. 56.

I was determined to make some sort of effort to get back. I wasn't just meekly going to do what those Grey Things wanted. If it made them happy in the heart to have me as their guest in Germany for the duration they would have to earn that honour.²⁰

Thomson's statement emphasised the agency that escaping gave POWs. Resisting captivity through escapes allowed POWs to reposition themselves from submissive captives to active agents. Thomson noted how he refused to accept his captive status, suggesting that he resisted his captors whenever possible. Importantly, he described the Germans as 'Grey Things', indicating their uniformity and abstractness. By characterising the guards as homogenous, he emphasised his individuality.

The way POWs portrayed their captivity to readers revealed that they emphasised resistance in their captive narratives. In a study about South African POWs, academic Karen Horn explored how men used humour and escapes to shape their identities. Horn noted that, 'POWs may have tried, through humour, to appear as soldiers fighting for a cause, and not as helpless captives waiting for liberation.'²¹ A similar narrative emerged in New Zealand POW accounts, with men using escapes as a way of resisting their captive identity. Riddiford noted the impact that POWs retelling their failed escapes had on the mentality of other prisoners at P.G. 5:

What I remember about the camp was a certain gaiety. Most people described their escapes in a light-hearted manner, and it was pleasant to be with people who were most of the time cheerful to the point of irresponsibility. This was one of the secrets of the good morale – no one indulged in self-pity but with a certain conscious recklessness that gave way to exaggerated optimism. The war would be over in ... six months or, at the outside, nine, was what

²⁰ Thomson, pp. 57-58.

²¹ Karen Horn, "'Stalag Happy': South African Prisoners of War during World War Two (1939-1945) and their Experience and Use of Humour', *South African Historical Journal*, 63, 4 (2011), p. 541.

people said, rather than ‘God knows when we will be out of this filthy jail.’²²

Riddiford suggested that escapes helped to improve camp morale by providing hope for the future. He noted that he was not depressed about failed escape attempts; instead, he enjoyed joking about previous attempts. Riddiford’s retelling of failed escapes implied that he revelled in the unpredictability of escapes. His optimism allowed him to frame his resistance against captivity as a light-hearted game. The dangers of escapes paled in comparison to the excitement that even failed attempts gave to the POWs. Escapes reminded men that they were not meek captives, they were usually joyful experiences where prisoners justified themselves to their fellow inmates.

Similar to Riddiford, other POWs noted how discussing escapes inspired others to take action. These stories often led to individual POWs gaining an esteemed reputation as an escapee. Warrant Officer Charles Croall, who was a renowned escapee, remembered that he ‘had a lot of prisoners coming to me to talk escape. They were seeking advice on matters of escape and I seemed to have a continual stream of them.’²³ Similarly, Thomas remembered hearing a story that boosted his will to escape:

One, a tall New Zealand Sergeant with a sense of humour, had seen his chance on a day of pouring rain, when a German officer had visited the camp hospital. The officer had walked into the lobby, and hung up his dripping coat and hat before entering the German guard-room. The Sergeant had donned these quickly and marched out into the rain. The sentries had all, one by one, frozen into a salute. Thereafter, he walked down the streets of Salonika. It was truly an escape to fire the imagination.²⁴

Thomas suggested the audacity of the story had motivated him to escape. The Sergeant’s story had portrayed the guards as incompetent compared to the POWs,

²² Riddiford, p. 69.

²³ Charles Croall, *“You! Croall?”* (Tauranga: Brian Riggir Computers, 2010), p. 157.

²⁴ Thomas, p. 86.

who were cunning and innovative. Thomas implied that the achievement inspired him to spend considerable time imagining other escape opportunities. The simplicity of the escape had shown that freedom was obtainable, and spreading stories of successful attempts encouraged potential escapees.

While many POWs viewed escapes as a means to disrupt the enemy, others sought to break the monotony of camp life. When captivity became too tedious, escapes provided POWs with an opportunity for adventure. Riddiford contrasted the different motivations for escape, concluding that

the most interesting characters were not those who were escaping because it was a matter of duty, but because it was the culminating expression of an outlook on life, in which adventure spiced with danger had a charm of its own.²⁵

This need to add excitement to a boring existence is rooted in the theories of escapism. Sociologists Stanley Cohen and Laurie Taylor examined how people used escapism to cope with the monotony of everyday life.²⁶ Cohen and Taylor argued that people could overcome boredom by introducing luck and unpredictability into their lives. They noted that:

Notions of luck, chance, fate and risk may permeate our everyday existence. Life's routines may be dull and monotonous at the moment, but there's always the possibility that something will happen. What better escape from paramount reality could there be than to be suddenly kidnapped by Lady Luck or Dame Fortune and transported to a novel world?²⁷

Cohen and Taylor suggested how randomness helped to lessen boredom. They stated that believing in chance was a powerful coping mechanism, noting that, 'Pure chance might transform us into a king, convey us to a desert island, free us

²⁵ Riddiford, p. 68.

²⁶ Stanley Cohen and Laurie Taylor, *Escape Attempts: The Theory and Practice of Resistance to Everyday Life* (London: Allen Lane, 1976).

²⁷ Cohen and Taylor, p. 104.

from our family, friends and work.’²⁸ POWs embraced the unpredictability of escape attempts; these activities provided hope in a world where every day felt the same. They convinced themselves that through escaping, a different, better outcome to the dreariness of everyday life was possible.

Hope was an important factor in escape attempts, especially when POWs planned their plots. Imagining how they would outwit the guards, and what they would do with their hard-won freedom was a welcome distraction from the uniformity of captivity. Thomas recalled how planning escapes allowed him to retreat mentally from his captivity and enjoy dreams of being beyond the wire. He noted how he felt the night before he tried to escape his camp hospital:

the night orderly came through on his rounds. I feigned sleep, but my mind surged with excitement. Optimism carried me through ecstatic moments as I pictured various scenes which would follow our success. I saw my arrival back with my battalion, the congratulations of the Brigadier. I saw myself walking quietly along the path through the garden at home, to surprise my mother as she picked the morning roses. Sleep was quite out of the question.²⁹

Thomas suggested that the anticipation of escaping allowed him to fantasise hopeful outcomes. In his excitement, Thomas imagined a successful escape where he displayed his courage to his comrades, who welcomed him back as a hero. He envisaged his return home, and was comforted by the tranquil scenes of his mother picking flowers. The next morning, Thomas contrasted his optimism with the monotony that other POWs were facing; he noted that when thinking about the possibility of escape, ‘it was the dawn of a new life.’³⁰

²⁸ Cohen and Taylor, p. 105.

²⁹ Thomas, p. 56.

³⁰ Thomas, p. 57.

As noted in the previous chapter, many POWs were confronted by the prospect of a prolonged captivity. Restrictions on camp life left men with few opportunities to break their everyday routines. Corporal Fred Stuckey recalled his feelings at Spittal camp in 1942, noting that he:

Felt the agony of being behind barbed-wire very severely all day.
The thought of being a prisoner hung over me like iron bands.
Longed for another chance to make another escape. Slept on my
bunk most of the day in order to try and forget that gnawing
thought.³¹

Stuckey stated that the mere thought of being a prisoner was overwhelming, and the only release from this torment was trying to escape. His description of feeling trapped by imaginary iron bands emphasised that captivity was both physically and mentally constraining. Stuckey suggested that he was disturbed at the prospect of being identified as a prisoner. His account noted how he longed for another chance to resist this classification, and another chance to escape his situation.

Camp life was monotonous, with many actions requiring the permission of the guards. Escaping, even briefly, provided relief from restriction and authority. In their study of escapism, Cohen and Taylor noted how people used travel to escape their everyday lives. They stated that:

Although there is some long-distance goal, the escaper is often on the run for its own rewards: sheer physical movement gives a potent illusion of freedom. He is always fleeing from, looking for, passing through. He cannot but be highly self-conscious of his enterprise, but tries to suspend this and live out the fantasy of being beyond the reach of society.³²

³¹ Fred Stuckey, *Sometimes Free: My Escapes from German P.O.W. Camps* (Ashurst: J. Stuckey, 1977), p. 48.

³² Cohen and Taylor, p. 183.

While Cohen and Taylor were describing how people resist the boredom of everyday life, there were clear parallels to the POW experience. Successful escapes gave men a break from the authority of the guards, even if most were later recaptured. Beyond the wire, POWs rejected their captive identities and experienced moments of freedom. When remembering one of his successful escapes in Greece, Thomas noted that:

The whole venture up to this stage had been cool and methodical. A desperate fear of risks had numbed my mind against any anticipation of success. But now at every step I felt welling within me a glorious exhilaration, an ecstasy so sweet that my eyes pricked with tears of gratitude. All the oppression, all the worry and boredom, which had so weighed me down, seemed to disappear as though they were taken like a heavy cloak off my shoulders. The air was pure and free.³³

Thomas stated that by leaving the camp space, a burden had been lifted off his shoulders. Moreover, he mentioned how captivity had weighed on him, and how being beyond the wire was invigorating. After being in a restricted space, he noted how every step filled him with joy. Thomas suggested that in those moments of freedom, he rediscovered aspects of himself that he thought were lost. He was no longer a defeated soldier beholden to the rule of the guards, instead he was his own man again.

Like Thomas, Croall remembered his elation after escaping through a hole in the wire from Lamsdorf VIIIB, Silesia:

And then I crawled away some distance and got out about 200 yards from the camp and stood up and waited for a friend to come out to join me. That was quite a thrilling experience, standing there and looking back at the lit up camp that I'd just escaped from.³⁴

³³ Thomas, pp. 96-97.

³⁴ Charles Croall, *From Lamsdorf to Thames a former POW retires locally*, 3 November 2011, interviewed by Krista Maley. Tape held at The Coromandel Heritage Trust.

For Croall, compared to the drudgery of captivity, a successful escape was a tangible achievement. Looking back at the camp from beyond the wire was an impactful moment in his POW experience. It was poignant memory that, even after the war, reinforced his resistance and agency. Similarly, Riddiford recalled how he was able to escape his camp. Riddiford planned to blend in with a French working party, and then simply walk out of camp with the group. Later, he and another escapee separated from the working party. He noted his thoughts on being free:

The thrill, the mad delirium of being free is beyond description. It was the reward of months of waiting and hoping in spite of many disappointments. It was a triumph over the Germans and I shall always remember it as a magic moment. Even if, by a sudden turn of fortune, I had been immediately recaptured, I would still have considered it an intoxicating achievement, a triumph in itself to be outside the barbed wire.³⁵

Riddiford framed his escape as a victory over the Germans and captivity. By taking on the identity of a French worker, he escaped the monotony of the camp, and started a new life beyond the wire. He noted how overwhelming it was to transition suddenly from the authority of captivity to the excitement of freedom. Camp life was dominated by routine and boredom, but escapes provided POWs with a break from this monotony. Even if these moments of freedom were brief, life on the run was fresh and exhilarating.

Although captivity forced people into close proximity to one another, it could be an isolating experience. POWs coped by forming relationships around shared interests, which included the desire to escape. Escaping was rarely an individual pursuit, it often required the support of multiple prisoners to have any chance of success. In order to increase the likelihood of successful escapes, many attempts were organised by committees, who gave help to POWs. Clifton noted that these escape committees took their responsibilities seriously, and only approved escapes

³⁵ Riddiford, p. 104.

that had a reasonable chance of the POW returning to active service. Clifton stated that at P.G. 29:

Our Escape Committee laid down that escaping meant ‘return to duty’, not merely getting out of the camp for a run in the country. Any attempt must therefore include a reasonable plot to leave the confounded country as well as the camp.³⁶

This statement indicated that plans required detailed preparation. POWs needed to explain how they would escape the camp and return to friendly territory. The committee’s insistence on men returning to duty implied that these groups were based on the men’s military identities. Contributing to these organised escape attempts allowed POWs to re-engage in the war.

While these committees regulated the men’s ability to escape the camp space, credible attempts were provided with invaluable help. Clifton recalled that when his escape attempt was approved:

Escape equipment was well organised. The Mapping Section had carefully prepared maps of the country for forty miles westward of Hadamar. Similarly, the Rations Section were concocting well-balanced concentrated emergency food containing chocolate, sugar, biscuit, ‘condensata’, and, I think, oatmeal. A two-pound block, carefully gnawed, kept one escaper fit and active for one week. Our Wardrobe Department produced clothing to suit most individual tastes in disguise. The make-up experts co-operated with them if necessary.³⁷

Instead of viewing escapes as a solitary, spur of the moment adventure, Clifton explained how some camps created complex industries to support these attempts. Committees were split into sections which specialised in providing different aspects to help escapes. The diverse layers to escape attempts enabled POWs to participate in this act of resistance without necessarily having to leave the camp

³⁶ Clifton, p. 258.

³⁷ Clifton, p. 362.

themselves. In some ways, helping to organise an escape allowed men to live vicariously through one another.

Rather than attempting to escape himself, Private Leonard Murray remembered how at Stalag VIIIB, Germany, he had swapped identities with another POW to improve their chances of success. Murray noted that in 1944:

The escape committee had arranged that I should change identities with Maurice Mayne, a Flight Sergeant, in the airforce compound. They chose us because we were similar looking. Maurice could also speak French and German so there was a good chance that he would make it back to England. Maurice and I managed the switch over and he managed to escape.³⁸

Murray suggested that escape committees ranked prisoners based upon their ability to successfully escape. Skills such as the ability to speak foreign languages were recommended. Murray's identity was required because airmen usually had stricter limitations placed on them, such as being unable to go on work assignments. It appeared that he willingly accepted this swap, even though it would have ruined his chances of escaping. In this case, Murray took pleasure in knowing that Maurice Mayne escaped the wire. The enjoyment was short-lived because Mayne was recaptured and the identity swap was discovered.³⁹ Still, being a part of a ruse that deceived the guards was a welcome distraction from captivity.

Where committees were not present, prisoners still adhered to some form of authority to organise escapes. These groups helped to bond the POWs around a common purpose, but they also created a hierarchy where outsiders had to prove themselves before they were included in planning. Riddiford remembered his efforts to be involved in escapes at P.G. 38, near Poppi, Italy:

³⁸ Leonard Murray, Unpublished Manuscript, MS-Papers-8807, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 8.

³⁹ Murray, p. 8.

From the outset I was prepared to join any scheme with any prospect of success, and was connected with two of the early tunnels. I was not, as I must in all modesty confess, in the inner ring of either of them. I did duty as a watcher when the tunnellers were at work, keeping an eye on the sentries, and in return was to have a chance of using the tunnel when the first wave of escapers had left.⁴⁰

Riddiford suggested that before he took part in an escape, he had to support other attempts. He gained the trust of more senior POWs by working as a watcher. Still, his position near the bottom of the escaping hierarchy was reinforced by his acceptance that he would be given a chance to use the tunnel only after many others had already escaped.

Trust was crucial in escape attempts, and committees conducted extensive vetting processes to restrict the possibility of treachery. Rae recalled that:

Security was naturally a high priority. This made it important to check that all incoming prisoners were genuine, as it had been known for the Germans to plant fake PoWs as spies to report any planned escapes. As a result each of us was interviewed and required to provide the name of some who could verify our bona fides or answer some very searching question if we couldn't.⁴¹

Rae's experience showed how paranoia affected the men's ability to group together. Committees were crucial in organising the men's attempts, but their security measures created barriers of entry into the world of escaping. Acceptance into the subculture of escape was limited to those who had either earned a reputation as an escapee or who provided a respected reference.

⁴⁰ Riddiford, p. 44.

⁴¹ Rae, p. 119.

In relation to escape attempts, mistrust was common. Failed attempts were often blamed on betrayal. Captain Dennis Brickell remembered instances of guards disrupting escape attempts:

The Goons were so successful in their discoveries that we became convinced there was a 'ring in' amongst us somewhere – it was uncanny the way a party of Germans would march in, go straight to a spot in a particular room, and say 'We are going to dig up your tunnel, Mr. So & So.' In many cases they knew the name of the chap in charge.⁴²

Brickell noted how the guards seemed to always be one step ahead of the prisoners. He suggested that plots failed because the Germans had planted spies in the camp. His reasoning reflected a fear of being watched, an unavoidable reaction to the restrictions of captivity. Similarly, Thomson remembered when he was caught hiding at Salonika camp, Greece:

What intrigued me was how they knew just which building to start tearing apart. No one who has been through Salonika Camp bothers to ask such a question. They all know who tipped off the Jerry. He had done it before. That is how he kept his job and lived in comparative ease, with walks downtown in the evenings and all home comforts.⁴³

Thomson suggested that some POWs leaked information to the guards in exchange for better treatment. It was not uncommon for prisoners to hinder escape plans, with some fearing the possibility of retribution against those left behind. These actions led escapees to distrust men who were unwilling to escape. Rae remembered that there was 'a small group opposed to any disturbance of the peace and who wanted to just wait for the war to end. Its opinion was accepted and tolerated but not respected.'⁴⁴

⁴² Dennis Brickell, Unpublished Manuscript, MS-Papers-1589, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 37.

⁴³ Thomson, pp. 191-92.

⁴⁴ Rae, p. 117.

Part of the reason why some POWs were disinterested, or even hostile, toward escapes was a fear of punishment. Private Harry Coleman recalled that escapees were aware that their actions might lead to others suffering. Coleman noted that:

The thing that held most potential escapees back was consideration for his mates. As soon as an escape had been reported they would have all been bundled up under double or triple guard and shoved into an isolation pen at Gruppignano or somewhere worse.⁴⁵

Coleman's statement showed how an individual's attempt at freedom restricted the lives of those left behind. Until the escapee was recaptured, the guards punished other prisoners to prevent further escapes. While unfair, the practice of disciplining innocent prisoners seemed to have affected the men's willingness to escape. Coleman suggested that many escapes were aborted because of a sense of loyalty to their fellow prisoners.

Before attempting an escape by jumping from a train on his way to Germany, Thomson recalled how one prisoner scolded him for putting the rest of the POWs at risk:

Not long before in my own truck one laddie had called me some very choice things for risking his comfort by my escaping. He screamed that the Germans would get rough and take all their rations. Others in the truck told him to shut up, and all I could think of was to invite him to come with me and so avoid the wrath to come.⁴⁶

Similarly, Captain John Borrie noted that leisure activities were suspended when prisoners escaped. After an escape in Greece, Borrie remembered:

German retaliation was swift. Our concert was cancelled, and the sound system dismantled. The cast had assembled on-stage and I

⁴⁵ Harry Coleman, *An Innocent Prisoner: Reminiscences of a Prisoner-of-War in Germany and Italy, November 1941 to April 1945*, MSX-4170, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 40.

⁴⁶ Thomson, p. 70.

unwillingly brought them the depressing news; there was a moment of silence, then, spontaneously, the entire company burst into a protest-concert.⁴⁷

The accounts of Thomson and Borrie suggest that the actions of escapees affected the entire POW camp. In Thomson's case, he was confronted by the idea that he was hurting his fellow prisoners. Still, the need to be free from captivity drove him to continue in his attempt. Escape attempts were an expression of resistance to captivity in which the escapee rejected the authority of his captors. However, for those left behind in the camps, Borrie's statement showed how the guards reasserted their authority. When taken together, the accounts emphasised an ebb and flow of power within the camps, in one instance the prisoner resisted his captor, only for the guards to reaffirm their control by punishing those who remained.

When escapees were recaptured, they were often sentenced to a period of solitary confinement. This enforced isolation was a stark contrast to the freedom that many had experienced beyond the wire. Croall described the conditions in solitary as

being in a small cell alone, 23 hours a day for the seven days of the sentence, the other hour was spent on 'exercise' in the yard, if weather was suitable, otherwise it was a short walk along the corridor for a few minutes, then locked back in the cell.⁴⁸

Although escaping their camps allowed POWs brief moments of freedom, solitary confinement was a harsh reminder that the guards still had control over their lives. Croall recalled how his punishment hindered his mobility; his decision to resist the restrictions of captivity had resulted in more oppressive conditions.

⁴⁷ John Borrie, *Despite Captivity: A Doctor's Life as Prisoner of War* (New Zealand: Whitcoulls Limited, 1975), p. 46.

⁴⁸ Croall, "You! Croall?", p. 98.

In summary, POWs used escapes mostly as an expression of resistance. Most escapes were group activities which required the permission of the camp's escape committee. While these committees provided invaluable help to escapees, they also restricted the men's ability to participate in escape attempts. There was an ever-looming sense of distrust among prisoners, and potential escapees had to earn respect by completing background tasks before they could attempt an escape. Nevertheless, committees shaped the camp space by helping to unite likeminded POWs together. These groups were often based on the men's sense of duty. Captivity weighed heavily on some POWs, they felt guilty that they had failed in their role as soldiers. Escape attempts helped to lessen the shame of captivity, with POWs repositioning themselves as a disruptive force behind the wire.

Escapes were also beneficial to the men's morale, because imagining escapes provided hope for the future. In their fantasies, POWs left their captive identities behind and became heroes in their own stories. Significantly, escapes have been used to construct a POW experience that the men were proud to share. Without these positive tales, POWs may have been unwilling to discuss their captivity. Escape attempts showed their resistance to being labelled helpless captives. Escaping, or fantasising about attempting an escape, provided POWs with a break from the rigours of everyday life. They were distractions where men evaded authority.

Chapter Three - Reimagining Pre-War Life

Nothing to do but mope
Nothing to see but wire
Nothing to sing but songs
Not good enough for the choir.¹

While the previous chapter examined the men's physical escape attempts, these efforts were only a minor aspect of captivity. This chapter shifts the focus toward other forms of resistance. It highlights the physical, intellectual and cultural activities that the men used to contest the camp space and their identities. For many POWs, daily life was a grind in which, other than their mandatory work requirements, they were largely left to their own devices. Far from the thrilling images of men constantly disrupting the enemy, most POWs struggled to note exciting events in their letters and diaries, with Sergeant Peter Howden remarking 'nothing happens much to break the unnerving monotony.'² This was especially true in the early stages of captivity, when camps provided little in the way of entertainment. However, over time, supplies arrived from benevolent societies that enabled leisure activities. These activities allowed POWs to engage in pleasurable pre-war hobbies. In the oppressive space of the prison camp, these fleeting moments of pleasure were crucial to maintaining the men's mental well-being. Without these distractions, hours of inactivity quickly turned into extended periods of self-pity and depression.

Although this chapter covers a lot of material, these accounts belong together because they share an underlying theme of how leisure activities acted as metaphorical escapes from captivity. POWs found relief from the monotony of

¹ *The Prisoner's Lament* by S Lyle-Smyth in John Steel, Diary, MSX-6127, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

² Peter Howden, Postcards, MS-Papers-7865-3, 17 October 1943, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

camp life in sports, theatre, reading, writing and academic pursuits. These activities were enclaves where prisoners resisted their captive identities and positioned themselves as athletes, actors, readers or writers. This chapter argues that POWs used leisure activities to counter the foreignness of the camp space. Engaging in these activities was a subtler form of resistance which showed how the men tried to find their experience. In a life full of uniformity and restrictions, they found ways to express themselves.

Boredom was a constant feature in the prison space, and in the initial stages of captivity POWs had little opportunity to distract themselves from their monotonous existence. Simple card games helped to alleviate the situation, with Private Peter Winter recalling that playing bridge 'tended to keep one's mind off food, escaping and the conditions of the camp, and filled the dragging hours.'³ Engaging in a game that distracted them from their captivity showed how POWs mentally retreated from their oppressing space. It showed their limited ability to contest their environment and to gain some control over how they spent their time. Warrant Officer R.H. Thomson remembered that at Salonika, Greece, the combination of hunger and boredom led many men to 'pine for the slightest break in the inactivity.'⁴ Similarly, Private Ian Cottrell noted in his diary that when he was in an Italian hospital he tried to learn German because, 'One must have something to do for I almost feel my brain rotting here from lack of exercise.'⁵ While there were many individual attempts to break the monotony of captivity, eventually these efforts became more organised. Organised activities provided a platform for POWs to implement limited control over their spaces; in doing so, they reconnected with aspects of their identity that had been stripped from them since their capture.

³ Peter Winter, *Free Lodgings: The true story of a Kiwi soldier's amazing bid for freedom* (Auckland: Reed Books, 1993), p. 46.

⁴ R.H. Thomson, *Captive Kiwi* (Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs Limited, 1964), p. 46.

⁵ Ian Cottrell, Diary, MS-Papers-5161-2, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, 5 October 1942.

The use of activities as a distraction from captivity was indicative of the need to mentally escape one's surroundings to achieve and maintain mental well-being. Social psychologists Frode Stenseng, Jostein Rise and Pål Kraft argued that activity engagement was a crucial coping mechanism to manage depressive situations.⁶ They stated that:

Task absorption results in a narrowed associative state that may be helpful for detaching oneself from the broader challenges of life. In other words, task absorption represents a 'nowness' that is consistently reported as a pleasure-inducing experience in relation to activity engagement.⁷

This statement, applied to my research about captivity, suggested that activities provided enclaves where prisoners were immersed in physical or mental engagement. While participating in these activities, instead of worrying about their problems, they were transfixed on the present. Some POWs still felt ashamed about being captured, while others struggled with the monotony of camp life. In this depressive space, leisure activities were an opportunity to transcend captivity. Whether they were physically active in sports competitions or mentally retreating into the narrative of a book, activities were reinvigorating escapes.

Similar to the arguments of Stenseng, Rise and Kraft, sociologist and geographer Kevin Hetherington explored how people used shared interests to resist routine and oppression.⁸ Hetherington noted that:

For those who find the conditions of everyday life routine, banal, morally unedifying and oppressive, or somehow perceive them to be inauthentic, the solution is often an escape attempt – an

⁶ Frode Stenseng, Jostein Rise and Pål Kraft, 'Activity Engagement as Escape from Self: The Role of Self-Suppression and Self-Expansion', *Leisure Sciences*, 34, 1 (2012), pp. 19-38.

⁷ Stenseng, Rise and Kraft, p. 21.

⁸ Kevin Hetherington, *Expressions of Identity: Space, Performance, Politics* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1998)

enthused re-centering of life and one's identity around a particular, chosen and, usually, shared interest.⁹

Hetherington suggested that activities provided people with an outlet for expression and individuality. When life became routine and oppressive, it was possible to escape into more pleasurable experiences. His argument about how activities were used as coping mechanisms was comparable to the findings of historian Amanda Laugesen, who studied the intellectual lives of Australian soldiers in various conflicts.¹⁰ In regards to POWs, Laugesen argued that leisure pursuits were

an example of the way in which they clung on to their identity as men and soldiers and demonstrates how they tried to assert themselves as autonomous human beings defined by more than their state of imprisonment. Like attempts at escape, reading a book, singing a song or performing a play could be an action of defiance against one's captors and an assertion of this autonomy.¹¹

Prisoners often felt like their captivity had made their lives meaningless, but they found salvation in camp activities. Leisure activities simultaneously reminded the POWs of their prior lives and what their post-war life might resemble. While the camps were oppressive, engaging in sports, theatre, reading, writing and academic pursuits provided the men brief moments of freedom.

Sports

Once POWs had adjusted to the initial disorientation of captivity, many began to organise casual and serious sports competitions. Researcher Pamela Cohen examined the influence of sports on Australian POWs during World War Two.¹² Cohen contended that:

⁹ Hetherington, p. 109.

¹⁰ Amanda Laugesen, *'Boredom is the Enemy': The Intellectual and Imaginative Lives of Australian Soldiers in the Great War and Beyond* (Farnham, GB: Routledge, 2012).

¹¹ Laugesen, p. 211.

¹² Pamela Cohen, 'Behind Barbed Wire: Sport and Australian Prisoners of War', *Sporting Traditions*, 23, 1, (November, 2006), pp. 63-86.

Sport became an integral factor in sustaining nationalist and patriotic values, defending Australianness; it provided POWs with activities to plan and prepare for, have discussions and place wagers on, participate in, become avid spectators of, and deconstruct in the usual post-game analysis.¹³

In her study of sport in POW life, Cohen argued that physical activity allowed POWs to ‘move beyond the immediacy of their surroundings’ and reconnect with pre-war life.¹⁴ Especially influential in reinforcing Australian national identities was Australian Rules Football, a game passionately followed by Victorians, and also strictly Australian. Cohen remarked that, ‘Australian POWs from other states who identified themselves as rugby union and/or league players put aside former prejudices to the sport, reflecting that they too wanted to be part of the one game that linked them integrally to nationhood.’¹⁵ While Australian Rules differentiated Australians, rugby provided New Zealanders with their own sport to identify with. Historian Keith Sinclair explored the relationship between New Zealand identity and sport, noting that in the early twentieth century, ‘Rugby stimulated national pride and national feeling. It brought the nation together, providing a focus for a feeling of unity.’¹⁶ This association with rugby was felt by many New Zealand POWs, who often referenced the game in their diaries and letters. In some instances, New Zealand POWs were aware that many Europeans had never witnessed rugby first-hand before, with Howden recalling:

In the working camps we had a game of rugby. The Germans and half the English said, ‘You can’t play football with a ball that shape.’ The funny part was that a lot of the English had never seen rugby played. Nor the Austrians, nor the guards.¹⁷

Howden suggested that he was puzzled that many people were unfamiliar with rugby. He expected to encounter spaces that had elements of familiarity; instead,

¹³ Cohen, p. 63.

¹⁴ Cohen, p. 64.

¹⁵ Cohen, p. 69.

¹⁶ Keith Sinclair, *A Destiny Apart: New Zealand’s Search for National Identity* (Wellington: Allen & Urwin New Zealand Ltd.), p. 152.

¹⁷ *Inside Stories: New Zealand Prisoners of War Remember*, ed. by Megan Hutching (Auckland: Harper Collins, 2002), pp. 80-81.

he was struck how something he viewed as ordinary, in this case rugby, was strange to others. Although Howden seemed to revel in showcasing a sport he enjoyed, it also reinforced his remoteness from New Zealand.

A similar occurrence was experienced by Lance Corporal Arch Scott and his fellow POWs when they were working at P.G. 107/7, an Italian farm camp. They ‘decided to have a game of rugby, and thus enlighten the natives with an exhibition of our national sport.’¹⁸ Scott noted that he viewed rugby as an essential part of his identity as a New Zealander. He framed his knowledge of rugby as a mark of civilisation, implying that those who were unfamiliar with the game were uncivilised. At a simpler level, Scott suggested that playing rugby reminded him of New Zealand, which was a powerful coping mechanism in the strange spaces POWs were forced to inhabit. These efforts to spread New Zealand culture appeared to be unsuccessful, with Private John Bettie recalling that at Lamsdorf VIIIB, Silesia, while his captors enjoyed spectating large sporting events, ‘The head Germans would turn up for the big soccer games too, although they had little interest in our rugby.’¹⁹

¹⁸ Arch Scott, *Dark of the Moon: The Unusual Story of one Kiwi's War* (Auckland: Cresset Books, 1985), p. 63.

¹⁹ John Bettie with Colin Amodeo, *Taking Life as it Comes: A Medical Unit Soldier's Story* (Christchurch: John Bettie, 1997), p. 59.

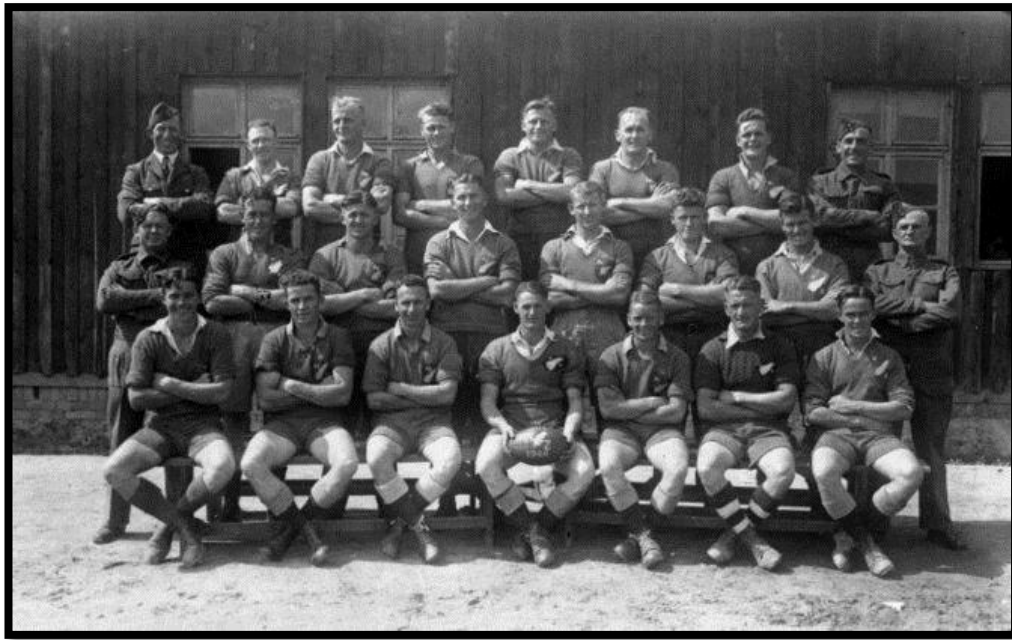


Figure 3.1. NZ POW Rugby Team at Stalag 344.²⁰

Figure 3.1. shows the importance that some POWs placed on sports. Men often posed for team photos, and in this case created uniforms to differentiate themselves from other teams. In the isolated camp space, belonging to a sports club allowed men to create support networks that required them to work together. Organised team sports also meant that players depended on one another to perform well. This relationship not only alluded to the men's pre-war lives, but also brought aspects of their military routines back into the camps. Associations with sports clubs made the camp space a tighter community, as well as raising the individual's self-esteem.

In the camps, New Zealand POW rugby matches were keenly anticipated, and as Sergeant Pilot Jack Rae remembered that at Stalag Luft III:

The rugby contests were fought out with great intensity in national teams, representing not only England, Wales, Scotland, Australia

²⁰ Chetwin, Colin Edwin, 1912-1991. New Zealand prisoners of war football team at Stalag 344, Germany - Photograph taken by C E Chetwin. New Zealand. Department of Internal Affairs. War History Branch: Photographs relating to World War 1914-1918, World War 1939-1945, occupation of Japan, Korean War, and Malayan Emergency. Ref: DA-10723-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/23007790>.

and New Zealand but also the USA, Canada and Rhodesia plus any others such as Poles and Czechs who formed the Exiles.²¹

National rivalries were central in POW sporting contests, especially between New Zealand and South Africa. Captain J.D. Gerard recalled that at Modena, Italy, 'there was considerable international rivalry between South Africa and New Zealand, and almost every week we had a Test match in one sport or another.'²²

Sports reinforced national and colonial allegiances, and in many respects camps became small replicas of the British Empire. Cricket historian Warwick Franks argued that a shared passion for games, such as cricket, allowed those with British heritage to bond in prison camps.²³ This idea was supported by historians Kate Ariotti and Martin Crotty, who argued that many POWs were confronted by the diverse cultures present in the camp space. Ariotti and Crotty contended that many men sought refuge from these foreign encounters and that, 'Emphasising their Britishness, through the playing of sport and other cultural performances, offered a way to mitigate this shaken sense of power and status.'²⁴ Similar to Cohen's arguments, Franks claimed that sports offered a welcome distraction from the drab realities of camp life. Franks stated that:

Those who experienced it remember the frustrating and sometimes debilitating feeling of being an important bystander removed from the war effort yet held far from the normal round of civilian life. So, the trapping of sport became an emblem of normality.²⁵

Franks suggested that sports were a means to find reassurance in the familiar for POWs. Captivity was confronting because it was different to the men's expectations of their wartime experience, as well as being unfamiliar to civilian

²¹ Jack Rae, *Kiwi Spitfire Ace: A Gripping World War II Story of Action, Captivity and Freedom* (London: Grub Street, 2001), p. 122.

²² J.D. Gerard, *Unwilling Guests* (Wellington: Reed, 1945), p. 87.

²³ Warwick Franks, 'Cricket in Stalag 344: Sport in German Prisoner-of-War Camps During World War II', *Sporting Traditions*, 11, 2 (November, 1994), pp. 81-90.

²⁴ Kate Ariotti and Martin Crotty, 'The Role of Sport for Australian POWs of the Turks during the First World War', *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 31, 18 (2014), p. 2363.

²⁵ Franks, p. 89.

life. Sports provided a refuge where POWs recalled happier times, they were momentary escapes from captivity and oppression.

Playing rugby was bound up with national identity and an assertion of masculinity. However, other, less familiar sports were seen as more feminine and thus initially less attractive. Sergeant Pilot Jack Hardie remembered how New Zealand POWs overcame the stigma of playing basketball at Lamsdorf:

In our compound we had a basketball court and several keen Canadian and USA players soon had a league in operation. At home basketball was a game for girls and we had never seen it played as they played it. It became very popular and many gave up rugby or soccer for basketball.²⁶

Hardie noted that he first perceived basketball as effeminate and lacking the physicality of other sports. However, he reconsidered his position after seeing how Canadians and Americans played the game. Hardie suggested that the enjoyment of playing basketball overrode the concerns of playing an unfamiliar sport. It is difficult to determine why basketball gained prominence over other sports in Hardie's camp. A simple explanation may be that it was easier to organise a game of basketball than it was to play other team sports. While two people can kick a rugby ball around, an actual game requires a relatively high number of players. Basketball is more flexible. As long as there is a ball and a hoop, enjoyment can be found in a variety of formats, from simple shootarounds to variations of competitive team play.

In addition to the physical release and reinforcement of national identities, sports impacted the prison space in an unexpected way; instead of the barbed wire restricting the men, Padre John Ledgerwood argued the camp boundaries at Wolfsburg, Austria, 'ceased to be a menace and became a protection from

²⁶ Jack Hardie, *From Timaru to Stalag VIII B: A Kiwi Airman's Wartime Story* (Wellington: Steele Roberts Ltd, 2009), p. 101.

intrusion once the football competitions dominated our waking moments.’²⁷ In these moments when physical exertion was possible, the foreign camp space was converted into familiar playing fields in which POWs experienced excitement and pleasure. The walls that had separated them from the outside world now enclosed them within a safe environment. In this space POWs played and cheered enthusiastically with their fellow inmates. These sporting events provided a pleasurable experience which was exclusive to them, and something that the guards were unable to participate in. Military historian Adrian Gilbert noted how sports had the ability to shape the foreign POW space into a more familiar environment, contending that:

The attempt to re-create the sporting atmosphere of home in an alien camp environment was most apparent at big matches, which in British camps took the form of internationals between the British home nations and the Commonwealth. Great effort was made in the staging of the games, with programmes, match reports in the camp newspapers, and appropriately attired teams.²⁸

The familiar space created by sports was recognised by Ledgerwood, who argued that it was not ‘unjustifiable to claim that our morale was sustained on the camp playing grounds at Stalag XVIII A.’²⁹

Sports became a communal event that bonded the men together, with Winter recalling that ‘Nearly every man in the camp belonged to one or more teams.’³⁰ Games ranged from serious to casual, with the former providing POWs with fierce competition. Camps were divided into sporting clubs, based largely on locality, and the identities garnered from these affiliations were distinctive. Gerard noted that at Modena, Italy, ‘For competition purposes the camp was organised into seven sporting clubs. The two New Zealand clubs were the Headhunters,

²⁷ John Ledgerwood, *Stalag XVIII A Wolfsburg*, MS-Papers-5644-3, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 14.

²⁸ Adrian Gilbert, *POW: Allied Prisoners in Europe 1939-1945* (London: John Murray Publishers, 2006), pp. 163-64.

²⁹ Ledgerwood, p. 14.

³⁰ Winter, p. 102.

which consisted mostly of Wellington men, and the Barbarians, who were from Auckland or the South Island.’³¹ Gerard stated that New Zealand POWs organised themselves into national teams for camp competitions. He suggested there were so many New Zealanders willing to compete that they had to split their playing group. The new clubs were based on the men’s regional allegiances, which were reminiscent of provincial competitions back home. Importantly, the aggressive names they assigned to their teams indicated how POWs used sports to escape the drabness of captivity. The ‘Headhunters’ and the ‘Barbarians’ implied an anti-authority attitude, which contrasted their mostly docile existence. While playing sports, they were no longer meek captives, they were powerful and untameable.

The pleasure that sports brought to camp life extended to spectating. Watching sports provided a welcome distraction for POWs. Gerard noted that ‘Barracking by the spectators was a feature of the play, and it was almost as tiring to watch a game as to play in it.’ Likewise, Corporal John Quinlan wrote home in 1944 from Stalag 383, Hohenfels, Germany, telling his parents that he spent

a lot of time watching cricket. There is a game on every day from 9am to 7.30 pm & a crowd are always lying round watching it. What with baseball, cricket, hockey, football, pass ball, there is always something to watch.³²

Quinlan implied that POWs did not have to play sports in order to participate, many men simply enjoyed watching others compete. When games were being played, there was an opportunity to forget personal problems and focus on the actions of others. Whether POWs cheered enthusiastically or were silently enthralled by the movement of bodies, watching sports was a viable mental escape from the dullness of captivity.

³¹ Gerard, p. 87.

³² John Quinlan, Letter Collection, MS-Papers-6503-1, 17 July 1944, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

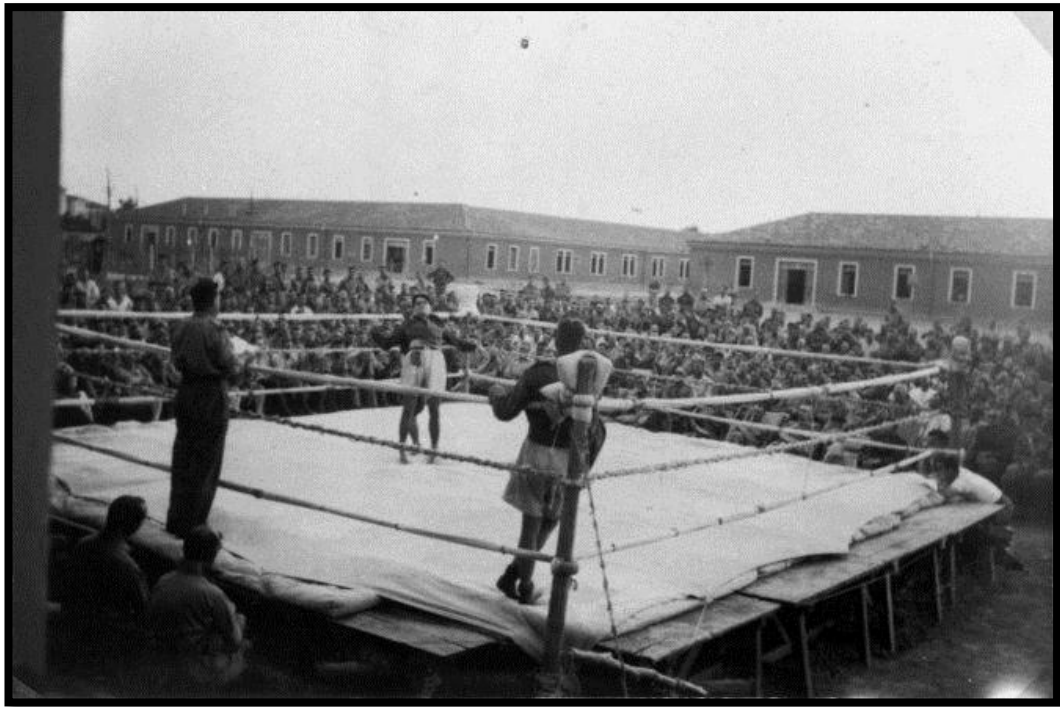


Figure 3.2. Jiu-jitsu display in a boxing ring, Campo 47.³³

These moments of enjoyment allowed POWs to encourage one another, while participating in light-hearted competition. Through organised sports, the men reinforced their national and pre-war identities, and they created a collective bond among their fellow POWs. Figure 3.2. illustrates how watching sports transformed the camp space from an isolating environment into a communal arena. In the image, the ring takes centre stage, with the POWs seated in the surrounding area. The spectators are focused on the activity in the ring, and in this moment the restrictions of the barbed wire and guards were no longer relevant. Similarly, Staff Sergeant John Hobbs noted how baseball games transformed his camp, P.G. 57, near Udine, Italy:

One could almost imagine one was watching a game at a Canadian or American University! The game became very popular, and hut, inter-compound, inter-unit, and international games were organised. In spite of the fact that many of the lads had never even

³³ Jiu-jitsu display at Campo 47, a prisoner of war camp in Modena, Italy. New Zealand. Department of Internal Affairs. War History Branch: Photographs relating to World War 1914-1918, World War 1939-1945, occupation of Japan, Korean War, and Malayan Emergency. Ref: DA-11314-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/23218539>.

seen this game played before, a high standard of efficiency was reached in senior games.³⁴

Participating in sports, either as a player or spectator, allowed men momentarily to transcend the oppressive camp space. This thesis argues that the POW experience was influenced by spatiality, and the above accounts provide compelling evidence that the men were active in trying to shape the spaces they inhabited. Sports allowed POWs to enjoy familiar experiences that reminded them of their pre-war lives. These moments reinforced the men's identities and helped shape the camp space into a more familiar environment.

While not in working camps, POWs lived a sedentary life, with ample time to reflect on and regret their situation. Sports allowed men to move, compete and be encouraged again. It also alleviated the constant boredom of camp life. Captain Bruce Robertson noted that his camp at Modena would have been 'really terrible if the chaps were not so keen on games.'³⁵ Physical distractions also provided humour to the men, and buoyed their morale. Robertson remembered the time when the POWs staged their own race meeting:

Today we have had a race meeting by the Modena Turf Club (there is no turf). Strange as it may sound the meeting was a huge success. Five races were run, the horses were toy affairs, highly coloured and ridden by colourfully dressed jockeys.³⁶

Likewise, Private Jack Gallichan noted races taking place in an Italian camp:

The jockeys were dressed up for the occasion, and so was the Clerk of the Course, who trotted about on a made-up horse. An announcer with a megaphone called the horses to their preliminaries and the jockeys, carrying their cardboard box,

³⁴ John Hobbs, Diary, MS-Papers-3958-2, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 36.

³⁵ Bruce Robertson, *For the Duration: 2NZEF Officer Bruce Robertson on Active Duty and 'In the Bag'*, ed. by Rosanne Robertson (Wellington: Ngaio Press, 2010), p. 139.

³⁶ Robertson, p. 147.

galloped down the side line kicking sideways at the crowd, and generally behaving like horses exuding energy at every jump.³⁷

These accounts emphasised how prisoners embraced sports as a way to escape their daily routines. While these events added much needed levity to the men's experience, they were also a form of resistance against the restrictions of captivity.



Figure 3.3. POWs participating in track events.³⁸

Figure 3.3. shows a well-attended athletics meeting, with POWs competing in a running race. It is striking how the picture is framed as a “normal” track event. The track appears to be well-defined, there is tape at the finish line, and the prisoners on the right appear to be officiating the race. The decision to have the runners compete shirtless helps to differentiate the athletes from the fans. The

³⁷ Jack Gallichan, *Barbed Wire Days*, MS-Papers-8910-01, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 141.

³⁸ Chetwin, Colin Edwin, 1912-1991. Athletics meeting at Stalag 8B prisoner of war camp, Lamsdorf, Germany - Photograph taken by C E Chetwin. New Zealand. Department of Internal Affairs. War History Branch: Photographs relating to World War 1914-1918, World War 1939-1945, occupation of Japan, Korean War, and Malayan Emergency. Ref: DA-10725-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22877900>.

spectators seem engrossed in the action, perhaps they are marvelling at the runners' ability to overcome the deprivation of captivity and show their athletic prowess.

Images of POWs enjoying themselves can obscure the privation and mental anguish that those men experienced. No doubt sports provided men with activities to bond over and a means of remembering their pre-war lives, but those moments were brief. After the games were over the POWs were still left in an unfamiliar prison space, without regular connection with their loved ones. In some cases, POWs were aware that participating in sports may be perceived by those at home as evidence that they had it easier than frontline soldiers. And although Robertson remembered certain sporting events fondly, he was annoyed that the public was inclined to believe that their captivity was easy. He noted that, 'One South African recently received a tennis racquet and balls. Such is the propaganda which is being served out. Tennis indeed! I wouldn't be surprised if some people thought we had a dance each week.'³⁹ Robertson suggested that the public were not aware of the hardships that POWs experienced in captivity. While receiving leisure packages from home reminded POWs that they were not forgotten, Robertson lamented that people thought prisoners were enjoying their imprisonment.

While participation in sports was a pleasant experience for many POWs, others remembered the ill-feeling suffered when they were unable to partake in strenuous activity. Private Lawrence Grafton was limited to less demanding sports, recalling that he could 'play cricket & volleyball, and go swimming, but I can't run. I can walk quite well, but can't run good enough to play the other sports.'⁴⁰ Sergeant James Jackson suggested that POWs could either

save your energy and lie on your bed all day, but we thought we'd
be better off playing. Even when we played a rugby match, we'd

³⁹ Robertson, p. 192.

⁴⁰ Lawrence Grafton, Typescript Diary, MS-Papers-8824, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 5.

only play ten minutes each way. It kept us fit. I think it saved us, at the end of the day.⁴¹

The trade-off between being physically capable of participating in sports and the need to relieve the monotony was prevalent in most POWs' experiences.

Robertson recalled the attempts at a boxing display, when 'A ring was allowed in and five good bouts were provided plus wrestling, some very amusing. Amazing what some of these fellows use for energy.'⁴² In addition to the poor physical state that limited the mobility of many POWs, the weather also affected sporting life in the camps. Howden noted in his letters home that 'life here has reached rock-bottom as weather has cancelled sport and the only thing to do is read and play cards.'⁴³

For those for whom organised sport was too physically demanding, the simple act of walking remained a necessity. Walking was a central feature in POW life, and some men were even able to walk beyond the confines of their camp. These rare excursions were generally reserved for officers, who were required to give their parole and promise not to escape. Captain Irving Randell recalled that when he was imprisoned at Oflag VIIB, Germany, he could visit a nearby cinema, with the only 'restriction during the free period being no conversation allowed with civilians and no visiting local villages or dwellings.'⁴⁴ Similarly, Quinlan noted in a letter home that at Stalag 383:

Last wk. went out on a walking party, six kilos or so thru the country & down to a little village & home. The village really beautiful, all the houses built of local stone & the whole place looking as if it had grown there rather than been built.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Hutching, p. 111.

⁴² Robertson, p. 209.

⁴³ Howden, 26 Nov 1944.

⁴⁴ Irving Randell, Diary, 2003.283, The Kippenberger Military Archive, Waiouru, New Zealand, p. 6.

⁴⁵ John Quinlan, Letter Collection, MS-Papers-6503-1, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, June 1944.

Quinlan's statement suggested that through excursions, some POWs were able to experience elements of familiarity. His message reads like a tourist log, with his group taking in the local sights. Quinlan noted that these new spaces were beautiful, implying a stark contrast to the ominous camp space. He marvelled at the authenticity of the village, the old buildings reinforced the history of the place. Rather than rudimental prison barracks, this was a place where people had lived for generations. When compared to the blandness of the prison camps, the village was vibrant, yet stable.

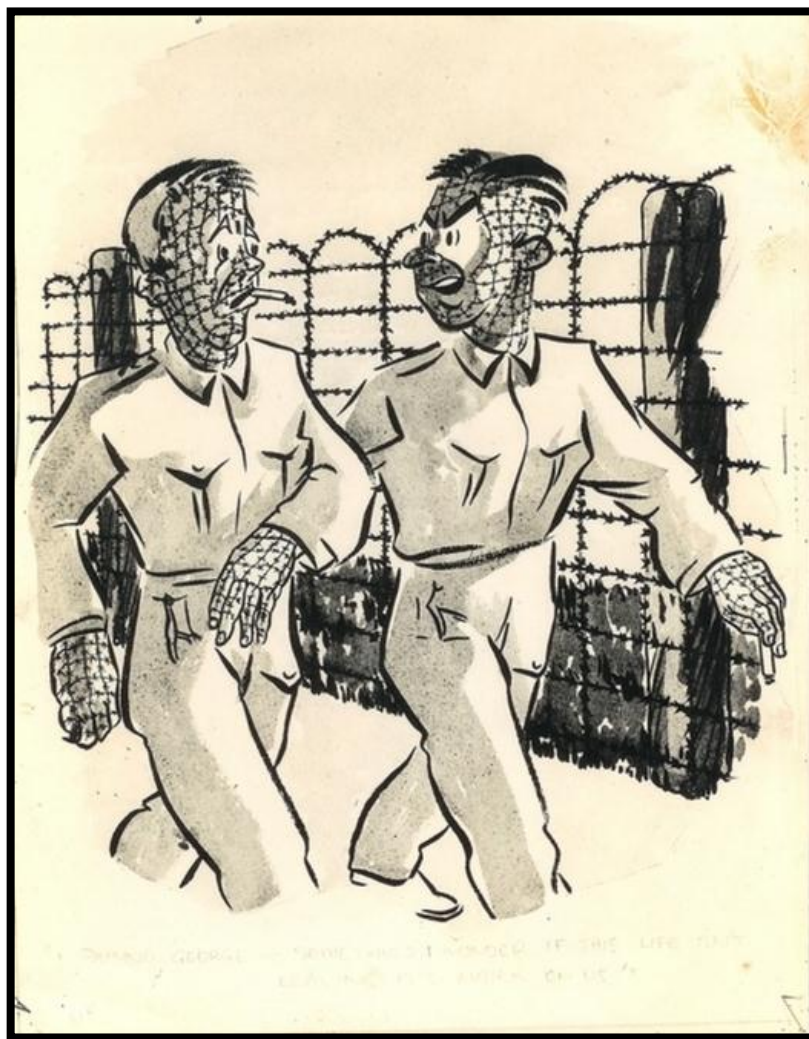


Figure 3.4. Cartoon alluding to barbed-wire fever.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Jim Welch, Untitled Cartoon, Graeme Welch Collection, 14-09/1-2, Picture Wairarapa.

Accounts of POWs walking beyond the wire revealed how some men were able to experience moments of familiarity. The camp space was dominated by restrictions and monotony. The constant presence of barbed wire, watchtowers and guards created a foreign environment. Figure 3.4. shows how prolonged captivity affected POWs, with the image depicting men with barbed wire on their skin. Excursions beyond the wire allowed men time away from this oppressive space to experience sights that reminded them of their pre-war lives. They saw civilians performing normal activities, and they encountered spaces that were not tainted by war or captivity. Captain Walter Morris recalled that walking beyond the camp space at Biberach, Germany, was a 'good cure against "wire fever"'.⁴⁷

Geographer Hayden Lorimer examined the relationship between movement and identity, finding that walking was an 'effective means of self-help, a journey to improved mental health, and an acceptable way to get to know ourselves better'.⁴⁸ In addition to the benefits of walking, Lorimer argued that walkers often 'circumnavigate the historical limits of a settlement or commons, and symbolically stake out both its, and their, territorial claims'.⁴⁹ This activity was exemplified by POWs, who found walking the confines of their camp a satisfactory distraction. Prisoners moved surprisingly freely within their camps, with Peter Winter remembering that they 'walked endless miles on a track inside the perimeter fence'.⁵⁰ Even in transit camps, walking was an important aspect of POW life. Captain Harold Smith remembered that at Benghazi, he often found himself 'walking around and around the enclosure, sometimes others joined me and sometimes I just walked alone, feeling really depressed'.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Walter Charles Morris, Transcript Diary, 1979/58, Waikato Museum, p. 23.

⁴⁸ Hayden Lorimer, 'Walking: New Forms and Spaces for Studies of Pedestrianism', in *Geographies of Mobilities: Practices, Spaces, Subjects*, ed. by Tim Cresswell and Peter Merriman (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), p. 24.

⁴⁹ Lorimer, p. 21.

⁵⁰ Winter, p. 33.

⁵¹ Harold Smith, *Memories of World War II: Experiences of a Junior Officer Greece, Crete, Egypt, Libya and POW* (Kaiaua: Smith Publications, 1996), p. 97.

In many cases, walking was therapeutic to both physical and mental well-being. Lieutenant Daniel Riddiford recalled:

There were two policies to be followed by prisoners. Either you could stay in bed, if you were lucky enough to have a bed, all day long, and, in a semi-comatose state, try to forget that you were a prisoner, or you could walk vigorously about the narrow confines of the compound in an effort to keep warm.⁵²

Riddiford's suggestion that many POWs lacked the necessary energy or motivation to take part in walking highlighted the privation that the men were experiencing. Thomson recalled that 'Walking outside was such an effort. It was still doubtful if one would get far without having a blackout and doing something undignified.'⁵³ Still, those who summoned the energy to move within the camp benefited from walking. Lorimer suggested that 'Mobility is what produces stability, or, a greater acceptance of internal instability.'⁵⁴ Camp life was monotonous, and the POW experience was confronting, but by exhibiting movement through walking, POWs had the opportunity to reflect on their situation, either individually or as group. The restricted nature of camp life provided a space where the simple act of walking became something to look forward to each day. Lorimer also contended that when people experienced limited mobility, physical activity served as a 'reminder that one's body still pulses during effort, and is capable of demanding physical exertion.'⁵⁵

Theatre

In addition to sports, theatrical performances featured prominently in the POWs' leisure activities. Most POWs noted the positive influence that theatre had on their mental well-being in their diaries or memoirs. Ledgerwood recalled that the shock of captivity was lessened by productions, noting that they 'were, in their way,

⁵² Daniel Riddiford MC, *Committed to Escape: A New Zealand Soldier's Story* (Martinborough: Ruamahanga Press Ltd, 2004), p. 32.

⁵³ Thomson, p. 28.

⁵⁴ Lorimer, p. 24.

⁵⁵ Lorimer, p. 24.

bright spots in an otherwise drab existence.⁵⁶ Hardie participated in the theatre at Lamsdorf because ‘It was good fun and it helped fill in the day.’⁵⁷ These shows were also attended by the guards, with Hardie contending that ‘There were always at least two English-speaking Germans at every performance as censors and the front row was usually taken by Germans.’⁵⁸ The appearance of the guards at these shows reminded POWs that although they had agency in these performances, it was limited, and that guards still held the power.

In their diaries and memoirs, prisoners fondly recalled the wide variety of plays and concerts performed in the camps. Those in attendance were provided programmes, which some men kept as keepsakes. Morris’ scrapbook included leaflets from *Count Albany* and *The Man of Destiny*.⁵⁹ Moreover, a camp music festival was organised where prisoners performed songs and dances from their homelands; the programme included New Zealand singing and a haka.⁶⁰ Sergeant Alfred Phillips also collected theatre programmes of *Sweeny Todd* and *Cinderella*.⁶¹ These leaflets added a professional touch to the proceedings and were another layer of immersion to help prisoners escape their physical surroundings. The leaflets listed the theatrical company performing the show, followed by the actors and stage hands. The *Cinderella* programme was noteworthy because it acknowledged the camp authorities for allowing the shows to take place.⁶²

Even with the constant presence of the guards, the ability to watch and enjoy performances allowed men to escape the harsh reality of their situation. Gerard remembered that at P.G. 38, near Poppi, Italy:

⁵⁶ Ledgerwood, p. 14.

⁵⁷ Hardie, p. 92.

⁵⁸ Hardie, p. 93.

⁵⁹ Walter Charles Morris, Diary, 1999.492, The Kippenberger Military Archive, Waiouru, New Zealand, p. 11.

⁶⁰ Morris, Diary, The Music Festival – Eichstatt, February 1944.

⁶¹ Alfred Phillips, Diary, 1994.394, The Kippenberger Military Archive, Waiouru, New Zealand.

⁶² Phillips, *Cinderella* programme.

It was interesting to watch people's faces during these concerts; most of them would be laughing and thoughtless, but here and there you would see the wistful face of someone who had mentally retired from his surroundings and realised the desperate falseness of our hilarity.⁶³

Gerard suggested that many POWs watched performances to escape the prison space. Men were engaged by the actions on the stage and were able to briefly forget their surroundings. Even though Gerard stated that the hilarity of the shows was false, he recognised that these distractions were crucial coping mechanisms against captivity. However, he noted how some POWs were unable to overcome their oppressing environment. For those men, captivity was overwhelming, and they found little enjoyment in pretending things were normal. Moreover, there were rare instances when POWs were allowed to watch films. Lawrence Grafton noted in his diary that he was often taken to a nearby village to see films. Grafton revealed that sometimes the films 'made me fee [*sic*] homesick, or at least, wish for the sort of company we don't get in this country.'⁶⁴ The feeling of isolation and remoteness deepened the men's mental fatigue, and, importantly, it never left the POWs even when they were experiencing moments of pleasure.

Similar to Grafton, Gallichan was one of several prisoners who received a ticket in a camp raffle to watch the movie, *Shall we Dance*. Gallichan noted that:

It was a treat. The sound was good and the whole show went off without a hitch. I enjoyed this little harbour on a barren coast tremendously, and, for the little time we rested in its shelter, I forgot the stormy seas outside. And, after the pictures, there was the prison camp again, and the mud, and the snow falling down. I felt as though somebody had awakened me from a pleasant dream by throwing a cold sponge in my face.⁶⁵

⁶³ Gerard, p. 67.

⁶⁴ Grafton, p. 5.

⁶⁵ Gallichan, p. 229.

His statement highlighted that watching a movie was an enjoyable experience, one which provided a brief escape from captivity. Engaging in a film or theatrical performance was a safe haven where POWs were momentarily protected from uncertainty and fear. Gallichan was engrossed in the serenity of the images, it was a much welcomed respite from the monotony of camp life. Still, the experience did not change the drabness of his situation, when he left the theatre he was confronted with the bleakness of captivity. The clean, warm images of the movie were replaced by dirt and cold.

It was evident in the accounts of POWs that the shows provided the men with a communal event that they were able to enjoy together. However, the planning of the events were also beneficial to those involved. A show required weeks of organisation, rehearsals and marketing. Hobbs discussed how this was an important distraction from the drab reality of camp life in Stalag VIIIA, Germany. After one particularly joyous show, he noted in his diary that, 'It was a thrill for me to have a part in this production, and we all enjoyed doing the show so much that the bottom seemed to have fallen out of life when it was all over!'⁶⁶ Hobbs suggested that productions were important distractions from captivity. Planning shows provided a break from the routine of everyday camp life. He noted how when working on a production he was a small part of a greater whole. These activities provided POWs an opportunity to bond with one another over a shared interest. Hobbs implied that the period between organising shows was distressing because when the production was over, he returned to the drabness of captivity. The production had given him a reason to live, it had added colour into a bleak existence.

⁶⁶ Hobbs, p. 61.



Figure 3.5. POWs before a theatrical performance in Stalag VIIIB.⁶⁷

Figure 3.5. shows two POWs who were preparing to perform a play. In this moment, the actors pose as a “normal” couple on a night out. Their costumes suggest a sense of elegance, which contrasts with the ominous barbed wire in the background. The men seem proud of their impending performance, one which gave a much needed distraction to their fellow inmates. As this photograph illustrates, an important aspect of theatrical productions was the need for POWs to take female roles. Many men welcomed these opportunities to playfully disregard their captive identity and lose themselves in the intricacies of a theatrical character. The drudgery of camp routines oppressed creativity, but the stage was a place for self-expression. Those acting out female roles appeared to have embraced the opportunity to briefly become someone else. Rae remembered that many actors who played females ‘did so very convincingly. They grew their hair

⁶⁷ *Show put on by New Zealand soldiers*, Hocken Collections, E6427/42, University of Otago.

long and flowing, and walked gracefully around the perimeter sometimes attracting wolf whistles.’⁶⁸

The POWs’ willingness to perform female roles inevitably led to moments of hilarity. Hobbs remembered that:

Catastrophies sometimes happens, such as the breaking of the cotton holding up a pair of artificial cardboard breasts! You can imagine the uproar this would create if it happens during the acting of a play before a male audience of Ps.O.W! It is amazing how a wig, artificial eyelashes, make up, and a dress will transform a very ordinary looking chap into quite an attractive female!⁶⁹

Hobbs noted how costumes and cosmetics were used to transform rundown POWs into symbols worthy of attraction. His description of the theatre emphasised that prisoners were willing to suspend disbelief. However, he suggested that sometimes the illusion would crumble when these makeshift items broke. Rather than becoming upset, these failures were seen as enjoyable events. Glimpsing the falsity of their constructions highlighted the men’s ability to revel in their strange situation.

Similarly, Gallichan described a dance that was held at an Italian POW camp. He noted that:

A dance was held last night in the recreation room and was a great success. Some of the fellows dressed up as girls for the occasion and their dresses proved that necessity is indeed the mother of invention. The effect was really humourous and I had my best laugh since becoming a P.O.W. One or two of the ‘girls’ did a line with the guards, who just could not understand it all.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Rae, p. 129.

⁶⁹ Hobbs, p. 64.

⁷⁰ Gallichan, p. 129.

Gallichan suggested that prisoners enjoyed these female impersonations because they were playful attempts to recreate a familiar experience. The dance was a welcome distraction from camp routines, but dances in captivity often featured elements of eccentricity. The men revelled in the quirkiness of their situation, dressing as women was an opportunity to emphasise their nonconformity. The guards found these actions strange, which made the events all the more hilarious for the prisoners.

In some instances the men who performed female theatre roles let their stage characters flow into other aspects of camp life. Robertson remembered that ‘One fellow has definitely developed a feminine swing of his shoulders and hips and rather a sweet smile. But perhaps I’ve been imagining things myself.’⁷¹ Similarly, Hobbs stated that:

On several occasions in the theatre dressing rooms I have found myself unwittingly drawing discretions and politeness of manner towards these ‘females’! Perhaps this is an indication of the first, or is it perhaps an advanced, stage of ‘wire happiness’?!⁷²

These statements indicated that males acting as females on stage had introduced an element of femininity to the POW space. While a minor aspect of camp life, seeing a person resembling a female was a momentary escape when POWs were reminded of their lives before captivity. Camps were almost exclusively male spaces, in which the only interaction with females was through letters. The presence of men portraying women on stage was seen as a sign of normalcy, an exciting break from the drabness of captivity.

⁷¹ Robertson, p. 188.

⁷² Hobbs, p. 65.



Figure 3.6. New Zealand POWs in a theatrical production.⁷³

The theatrical productions performed by New Zealand POWs also reflected their nationality. In many cases they presented plays with a particular emphasis on Māori. Robertson recalled working on these productions, noting that ‘Our Maori show improves apace. It will be really good and I hope the camp appreciates the music.’⁷⁴ It appeared that the men were apprehensive about whether other nationalities would approve of this unique aspect of New Zealand culture. However, in another camp, Morris recalled that ‘Maoris gave a good show. Great appreciation by the English officers – much applause.’⁷⁵ Figure 3.6. illustrates the diversity of the performances that New Zealanders produced, with men dressed in traditional British and Māori clothing.

Cases of POWs swapping lives with other prisoners further revealed the complexities of identity construction within the camp space. The monotony of camp life led some men to seek refuge and pleasure in the lives of others. Warrant

⁷³ *Anzacs on Parade*, Sir George Grey Special Collections, 7-A16552, Auckland Libraries.

⁷⁴ Robertson, p. 203.

⁷⁵ Morris, Transcript Diary, p. 20.

Officer Charles Croall recalled an instance at Lamsdorf when he changed identities with Alex McLelland, an Australian POW. Croall noted that:

Alex and I changed uniforms, bed spaces and took over each other's identity. We had to learn the personal details that German records held which proved our identities, and allowed us to live different lives. It was exciting living under a different character, with the expectation of being challenged at any time, several weeks had gone by when the new identity become our lives.⁷⁶

Croall noted that men shared intimate details of their lives with other POWs. These intricacies were necessary to form a character who was capable of withstanding scrutiny. POWs used identity swaps to break the routine of camp life. Compared to the drabness of captivity, pretending to be someone else was exciting. In the overwhelming mass of prisoners, Croall suggested that identity swaps helped POWs to connect with one another, learning the details of someone else's life made men feel distinct and human. These mostly playful attempts at fantasizing another life were a reflection of the fluidity of identity in captivity. The men were physically confined to their camp space, but internally they exhibited a pronounced amount of agency. Their ability to shape how they were represented was crucial to their identity construction.

While imprisoned in Spittal camp, Captain Daniel Riddiford also changed identities with his batman, but quickly reverted back to himself. Still, Riddiford noted that he had

found a strange fascination in losing my identity and acquiring a new one. The attitude, even of people who knew you, underwent a change, so that it seemed as if you were looking at the world through spectacles which gave it a new appearance.⁷⁷

Riddiford stated his experience with identity swaps was a welcome escape from the monotony of captivity. Changing identities was an opportunity for men to

⁷⁶ Charles Croall, *"You! Croall?"* (Tauranga: Brian Riggir Computers, 2010), p. 111.

⁷⁷ Riddiford, p. 89.

forget their troubles and be consumed by the details of another life. He suggested that swapping identities gave him a different perspective of his situation. Before his swap, he was aware of only his own situation and feelings; it was almost as if he was seeing the world in black and white. After changing identities, he came to understand that his viewpoint was only one of many; the connections he made with other POWs revealed new worlds.

Reading, Writing and Academic Pursuits

With their poor diet, POWs often had to resort to less strenuous activities to fill their days. For many, solitary pursuits, like reading, were necessary to alleviate the monotony. Prisoners received books through personal packages and charitable organisations. In order to meet growing demand for reading material, the Red Cross established the Indoor Recreations Section, which became responsible for organising supplies for leisure activities.⁷⁸ This service was invaluable in providing books, with the more than 239,000 volumes on a vast selection of topics being sent to prison camps.⁷⁹ Books became a mainstay in camp life, with Ledgerwood recalling that ‘They were a godsend! For, lacking reading material, we were inclined to be restless and irritable.’⁸⁰ The ability to read provided POWs with the opportunity to fantasise and escape their restricted captivity. Lance Bombardier Jim Henderson remembered that ‘tales of movement and love and good food and kindness and firesides and paintings and gardens and little pubs – all that which was denied to us, books brought back.’⁸¹ Henderson suggested that stories reminded POWs of pleasurable experiences. He noted the positive aspects of books, which were in stark contrast to the prison space. He read about movement without restrictions, love not hate, an abundance of food rather than scarcity, warmth instead of cold. The arrival of new books into camps became

⁷⁸ British Red Cross Services for British Prisoners of War, <<http://www.redcross.org.uk/About-us/Who-we-are/History-and-origin/Second-World-War>> [accessed 29 August 2016], p. 4.

⁷⁹ Recreation Parcels for Prisoners of War, <<http://www.redcross.org.uk/About-us/Who-we-are/History-and-origin/Second-World-War>> [accessed 29 August 2016], p. 2.

⁸⁰ Ledgerwood, p. 7.

⁸¹ Jim Henderson, *Gunner Inglorious* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 93.

events for POWs, with Howden writing home that they had received ‘a wonderful selection from Shakespeare to the latest thriller.’⁸²

The prevalence of reading raises the question of what were these men reading? In his study of books in POW camps, David Shavit sought to uncover the reading tastes of prisoners.⁸³ Shavit revealed that a vast selection of material was available, and at Stalag Luft III, Sagan, the ‘most highly demanded books by order of importance were: (1), well-worn popular novels; (2), detective fiction; (3), western fiction; (4), travel; and (5) biography.’⁸⁴ In addition to these fictional works, the camp at Sagan also supplied issues of American magazines, such as *National Geographic* and *The New Yorker*.⁸⁵ Shavit noted that ‘the lending library of the Center Compound once held a total of 1,944 volumes: 1,128 works of general fiction, 75 westerns, 342 detective novels, 28 biographies, and 371 miscellaneous books.’⁸⁶ Even though it is unclear if this amount of material was indicative of other camp libraries, Shavit showed that reading was a viable and well-resourced escape. Although the prisoners studied in this thesis offered few notes regarding their reading tastes, some were imprisoned at Sagan, so they presumably had access to these resources.

Camp life was highly structured and repetitive, and in their isolation, every day could feel the same. Whether they were fantastical tales or stories grounded in reality, books provided an escape from the monotony of captivity. Librarian Soheli Begum wrote a noteworthy study of books and escapist reading, and the theories put forward are applicable to the POW experience. Begum noted that, ‘To many readers, escaping into imaginary worlds is a means of distraction from the monotony of everyday life.’⁸⁷ As Henderson suggested, POWs used books to

⁸² Howden, 20 December 1942.

⁸³ David Shavit, “‘The Greatest Morale Factor Next to the Red Army’: Books and Libraries in American and British Prisoners of War Camps in Germany during World War II”, *Libraries & Culture*, 34, 2 (1999), pp. 113-34.

⁸⁴ Shavit, p. 123.

⁸⁵ Shavit, p. 123.

⁸⁶ Shavit, p. 123.

⁸⁷ Soheli Begum, ‘Readers’ advisory and underestimated roles of escapist reading’, *Library Review*, 60, 9 (2011), p. 741.

experience activities that they were incapable of enjoying in captivity. While reading, a prisoner escaped the drabness of camp life and was transfixed on the narrative or theory of his book. Furthermore, Begum argued that reading was a form of resistance, one in which an individual emphasised his opposition to lethargy. Begum noted:

The escapist power of leisure reading is such that readers make a statement every time they simply pick up a book. Reading to escape a tedious day of chores is a declaration that, despite monotony, one chooses to remain engaged. Reading as refuge from terror or decidedly difficult life situations is a testament to humanity and the refusal to become complacent prisoners, regardless of one's surroundings. Emotionally and mentally connecting with the reading material allows readers to validate beliefs, reshape ambiguities, and ultimately forge a place in the spaces they occupy.⁸⁸

Begum stated how reading helped to shape identity and the spaces people inhabited. Books became refuges for many POWs. They were shelters where they could escape the drabness of captivity and be temporarily transported into a world that was stimulating.

More specifically related to my research, reading historian Edmund King explored the influence that books had on the experiences of World War One prisoners of war.⁸⁹ King suggested that mental activities, such as reading, allowed prisoners 'a way of exerting some element of control over life behind the wire.'⁹⁰ Moreover, he argued that:

While books could be a way of occupying time in captivity, they could also be a way of controlling *space* in the prison camp, although they rarely offered a complete or uncontested solution.

⁸⁸ Begum, p. 744.

⁸⁹ Edmund G.C. King, "'Books Are More to Me Than Food': British Prisoners of War as Readers, 1914–1918", *Book History*, 16 (2013), pp. 246-71.

⁹⁰ King, p. 254.

One of the most frequently mentioned qualities of prison-camp life recalled by memoirists was its sheer incessant sociability. Virtually all living accommodations were shared with other inmates, and there were few physical barriers separating them One solution to this problem was to wield a book as a kind of shield against social interaction.⁹¹

It was revealing that POWs contested their personal space with their fellow prisoners. The ability to retreat from their immediate surroundings, albeit briefly, shows a surprising amount of agency that has been overlooked in many studies of captivity. King suggested that POWs used books as an escape from socialising with other prisoners. Through reading, or appearing to read, POWs mentally retreated from the masses of people and the monotony of captivity. Within the pages of their books, prisoners found a personal sanctuary which they could embrace as their own.

The lack of solitude was expressed by many POWs, with the cramped living conditions providing a space where frequent interaction was unavoidable. For brief moments, activities, like reading and education, allowed POWs the opportunity to mentally escape the claustrophobic conditions. But these experiences were short-lived. No matter what the POWs did to shape their environment, the camp was a communal space; one that was shared by both the prisoners and their guards. Robertson expressed his contempt for the situation, noting that:

It's hopeless to think or even formulate sensible thoughts or sentences in this room. There is a constant chatter from daylight till 10.30pm. The room is feet deep in verbal diarrhea! It's really exhausting. Gibbering visitors are in and out all day, ear bending on the war and the Russian line and old battles and women and food – drives one cranky.⁹²

⁹¹ King, p. 262.

⁹² Robertson, p. 212.

In these cramped conditions, personal space was limited. POWs lived among each other to an almost unimaginable level. Rae noted that the loss of freedom was confronting, and it was amplified by being plunged into ‘an oppressive mass of males in permanent close proximity was in itself stressful but added to this was the depressing atmosphere of the place.’⁹³ These thoughts were echoed by Warrant Officer Galbraith Hyde, who recalled that among the worst aspects of camp life was the ‘continual close proximity to people, you could seldom get away by yourself’.⁹⁴ The inability to move and find solitude meant that small squabbles could turn into serious resentment toward other POWs.



Figure 3.7. A library in a POW camp.⁹⁵

⁹³ Rae, p. 120.

⁹⁴ Galbraith Hyde, *The Personal Account of One Man's War 1939-1945*, MS-Papers-5290, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 48.

⁹⁵ Upton, H T, fl 1943. Prisoners of war in the library at Stalag 8A, Gorlitz, Germany. New Zealand. Department of Internal Affairs. War History Branch: Photographs relating to World War 1914-1918, World War 1939-1945, occupation of Japan, Korean War, and Malayan Emergency. Ref: DA-10621-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22546733>.

Even with the cramped living conditions, reading was a welcome relief for POWs, especially when camp libraries were established. Figure 3.7. shows two POWs interacting, perhaps suggesting books to one another, in a camp library. They are the only people in the photograph, implying that they control that space. There are no windows visible, indicating that the library was a place where POWs could retreat from camp life. It was a stronghold where they could be consumed by the familiar experience of going to the library.

King's exploration of the influence that reading material, and the eventual construction of British libraries, had on the camp space was remarkably similar to the experiences of New Zealand POWs. He contended that libraries became a key feature in camp life, and that these spaces became hubs of nationalism. King argued that reading a book allowed POWs agency over their personal space, but 'libraries of English books in prison camps provided their patrons with a way of collectively withdrawing from the foreign geographical spaces surrounding them.'⁹⁶ In these spaces, or 'cultural and linguistic bubbles ... prisoners could take refuge and negate their captive status.'⁹⁷ This statement supports this thesis' argument that POWs exhibited agency over their environment, eventually shaping the foreign camp space into a more familiar place.

Similar to the impact that libraries had on the POW camp space, historian Miriam Intrator studied how libraries were safe havens during the Holocaust.⁹⁸ Intrator stated that at the Theresienstadt Ghetto Central Library

prisoners were literally desperate to escape through reading. Books made it possible to withdraw from an unendurable reality and to take temporary mental refuge in other worlds, past or present, real or fantasy. In Theresienstadt those who succeeded in this

⁹⁶ King, p. 265.

⁹⁷ King, p. 265.

⁹⁸ Miriam Intrator, "'People were literally starving for any kind of reading': The Theresienstadt Ghetto Central Library, 1942-1945", *Library Trends*, 55, 3 (2007), pp. 513-22.

recognized their small, but not insignificant, triumph over Nazi efforts at total control.⁹⁹

Furthermore, she noted that:

Of course not all had access to or even knew about the library, but for those who did, being able to read, share, and discuss books was a reminder that minds and imaginations were alive and free, in spite of the conditions and restrictions that threatened to destroy everyone in the camp.¹⁰⁰

Intrator explained that libraries became shared spaces where prisoners sought refuge from Nazi atrocities. Internees engaged in reading as a form of resistance, a symbol of their refusal to succumb to despair. Although life in ghettos was horrific, some prisoners saw books as a sign of their humanity. While their captors tried to dehumanise them and control their bodies, reading became an outlet for individuality and mental freedom.

New Zealand POW Peter Winter emphasised the relief that the shelter of the library provided him during his captivity. Winter remembered that:

The library, supplied by the Red Cross, was excellent, and those of us who read for pleasure found it a great help in forgetting our squalid surroundings and the everlasting presence of too many of one's fellows. I found living in a crowd particularly distressing.¹⁰¹

Winter suggested that camp libraries provided a physical escape from the prison camp. Within the library, prisoners savoured moments away from the constant noise of barrack life. He noted how the shelves were stocked with books from the Red Cross. These books were familiar items that served as reminders of English culture and were striking in the mostly foreign camp space.

⁹⁹ Intrator, p. 516.

¹⁰⁰ Intrator, p. 516.

¹⁰¹ Winter, p. 102.

In addition to reading, some prisoners retreated from captivity by writing diaries. These journals contained a vast selection of writing, some were daily descriptions of camp life, while others were collections of poems and other touching verses that the men had heard or created in the camps. Although there were many examples of prisoners writing, some found it difficult to create meaningful material. Private Ross Maxwell noted in his diary that:

If the main function or purpose of this diary is to give me something to do writing it up, then it's a successful venture. Otherwise, it's an out and out failure, as all I seem to be able to put in it is a lot of drivel about nothing at all.¹⁰²

Maxwell noted that he felt his writing was worthless and only served to pass the time. The monotony upset him because he suggested that nothing worth mentioning happened in the camps. Still, the diary was a safe place where he could vent his frustrations about captivity.

Gallichan remembered writing positively, noting that his diary was crucial to coping with captivity:

Through all those months which turned slowly, so slowly, into years, my diary remained my closest friend and close confidant, offering sympathetic companionship when things were grim, congratulations for good times, which came rarely, and understanding when, being human, I made mistakes.¹⁰³

Gallichan stated how he found emotional strength in confiding in his diary. When things were bleak, writing was an escape from captivity. His journal became a place where he was mentally free to express his thoughts and unload his troubles. Gallichan's reference to his diary as his 'friend' implied a companionable function of writing. Confiding in his journal lessened his feelings of isolation, and personifying the diary helped him feel that he was not alone.

¹⁰² Ross Maxwell, Typescript Diary, MS-Papers-4401-7, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 8.

¹⁰³ Gallichan, p. 6.

Other prisoners used their diaries to express themselves through poems. Sergeant E.H. Everton wrote a verse, entitled 'Wire', about the restrictions of captivity:

Barbed wire snaking spiked and straight
From post to post inexorable as fate
Often subjugates the mind
And makes it difficult to find
A surcease from its strangling grip
The helpless feeling of its censorship¹⁰⁴

Everton noted how the barbed wire represented the restrictions of captivity. The wire not only physically imprisoned the men, but also constrained their thoughts. Even though his statement implied a sense of impotency against a force much larger than himself, writing was a statement of freedom against the 'grip' and 'censorship' of captivity. When Everton was writing poems, he was free from the authority of the guards. Likewise, Captain Gordon Cowie invoked his vision of Wellington in one of his poems:

We long for those strong much berated winds,
Narrow winding streets & high encircling hills,
Such pictures now just of our longing minds
Will soon be real & banish all our ill

And you & I in that now distant city
Will bandy lurid tales and gain much pity,
Of marching, starvings, chainings, & shootings,
Of plannings, diggings, hopings, & movings,
Of sauerkraut, wurst, quark, & much other small beers,
And life endured within the barbed wire here.¹⁰⁵

Cowie's writing formed a vibrant mental image of Wellington, one which was welcoming and safe. He noted that his return home would relieve the pain he had suffered in captivity. Rather than being overwhelmed by the city's encircling hills

¹⁰⁴ E.H. Everton, 'Wire', MS-Papers-10082-06, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

¹⁰⁵ Gordon Cowie, Diary, MS-Papers-2285-2, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 104.

and claustrophobic streets, Cowie implied that these restrictions would be his fortress against his prior experiences.

The widespread appeal of reading and writing often led to the pursuit of further education, and it was surprising how quickly academic studies became a feature in camp life. Similar to the provision of books, the Red Cross created the Educational Books Section to satisfy the demand for a more formal learning programme.¹⁰⁶ Based out of New Bodleian library at Oxford, the organisation secured the services of educational bodies and professional institutions.¹⁰⁷ While formal proceedings took time before they were established, Robertson remembered how prisoners embraced camp education services

classes of all description were soon started and as we had many clever scholars in our midst, we were not lacking in tutors, who were only too pleased to teach and at the same time refresh their own minds. Languages, psychology, radio, economics, bridge etc were at our disposal. In addition, popular lecture on any subject were given regularly by a person so inclined. Some remarkably interesting subjects were expounded to us.¹⁰⁸

Robertson revealed that it was not only the students who benefited from educational pursuits, but also the teachers enjoyed sharing their expertise. These moments served as a reminder of their pre-war lives, and gave the lecturers a feeling of respect and dignity again. The classroom became an escape for students and teachers alike, a space in which the usual camp rules need not apply. The POWs organised themselves, and further tasks, like homework or examinations, were set by the teachers. The classroom became a space where the POWs were empowered, and the influence of captivity was briefly lifted. Private Dudley Muff kept a humorous diary to share with his niece when he returned, in which he joked about in-class discipline, noting that ‘I nearly went to school today, but was afraid

¹⁰⁶ British Red Cross Services for British Prisoners of War, p. 6.

¹⁰⁷ British Red Cross Services for British Prisoners of War, p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ Robertson, p. 100.

I might be put in the corner, so stayed home.’¹⁰⁹ Muff’s allusion to the hierarchies created by academic activities showed how certain POWs had more power than others. In this case, the teachers had more control than their students. The changing power relationships that saw POWs exert control over their fellow inmates highlighted a unique aspect of how POWs contested the camp space. Rather than accepting that the guards held all the power, POWs willingly submitted some of their limited agency to other prisoners.

In some cases, academic study became a serious pursuit that provided not only mental relief, but also opportunity for the future. Historian David Rolf examined the role that formal education had on the POW experience. Rolf argued that structured learning provided a ‘system which enabled POWs to cope with the enormous pressures of life behind barbed wire and which gave some hope and semblance of direction to their otherwise pointless lives.’¹¹⁰ Many men engaged in education as a way of passing time while in captivity. However, as Rolf suggested, working toward a degree or certificate allowed POWs a tangible reward for their efforts. Moreover, Rolf argued that POWs used their time in captivity to improve themselves in anticipation of their post-war lives:

While men would have studied, no doubt, simply as a means of passing time and often did so in subjects far removed from their normal civilian occupations, many others wanted some definite goal at which to aim. Professionally organized and recognized examinations gave point to their existence in camps and, in some cases, enabled them to begin or extend qualifications necessary in their civilian life.¹¹¹

Self-improvement while in captivity reveals a different form of resistance than what is portrayed in more escape oriented histories.¹¹² Rather than physically

¹⁰⁹ Dudley Muff, *Alison’s Book*, 2005.420, The Kippenberger Military Archive, Waiouru, New Zealand, p. 39.

¹¹⁰ David Rolf, ‘The education of British prisoners of war in German captivity, 1939-1945’, *History of Education*, 18, 3 (1989), p. 258.

¹¹¹ Rolf, p. 260.

¹¹² Rolf, p. 265.

resisting camp authorities, some POWs chose a more passive approach to fighting the enemy. Educational programmes were diversions where POWs escaped the drabness of captivity and were inspired by learning.

Formal education also gave the men a connection beyond the camp space. For examinations to be accepted, a POW had to subject himself to independent tests, where the rules were created ‘outside the wire and so untouched by all the troubles of his immediate world.’¹¹³ Educational programmes were not without their difficulties. Camp organisers struggled to overcome two sets of censors, which contributed to delays in getting the necessary materials.¹¹⁴ However, the accounts studied in this thesis show that these difficulties did not deter the POWs’ willingness to learn. Rolf concluded that

when judged both by numbers of students and their successes, the examination scheme was a considerable triumph. At the close of the war in Europe nearly 17000 applications for examinations had been made in 82 camps. Over 10000 candidates had sat 6091 different papers of 136 examining boards and, of the results published, over 78.5% of them had passed outright.¹¹⁵

Likewise, Captain John Borrie remembered that, at Lamsdorf, the education programme held ‘classes in English, French, German, History, Maths., Engineering – leading to London University Matriculation – and even a degree. Senior N.C.O.s with Cambridge degrees had developed this scheme through the Educational Section of the British Red Cross.’¹¹⁶ These studies were not entirely independent, with the German guards exerting a level of control over the learning material. Robertson remembered that, at times, classes were called off because the ‘Germans insist on having the syllabus of each subject presented to them in German for their approval.’¹¹⁷ However, the ability to achieve a level of success

¹¹³ Rolf, p. 260.

¹¹⁴ Rolf, pp. 261-62.

¹¹⁵ Rolf, p. 263.

¹¹⁶ John Borrie, *Despite Captivity: A Doctor's Life as Prisoner of War* (New Zealand: Whitcoulls Limited, 1975), p. 69.

¹¹⁷ Robertson, p. 165.

that was recognised outside the camp provided POWs with a valuable connection and outlet for expression. King contended that the development of academic groups in prison camps alluded to a need to ‘reclaim a degree of civilian identity – to regain contact with a prewar (and implicitly postwar) self.’¹¹⁸ These educational pursuits allowed POWs ‘both to cement relationships within camp and to claim membership of social collectives outside it.’¹¹⁹

The theme of like-minded groups being formed was common in the POW experience. In most camps, the men distributed their own newspapers containing news and stories. This medium allowed POWs to formulate narratives relating to their current situation, and the possibilities for the future. In regards to the New Zealand POW experience, the most notable newspaper was the *Tiki Times*. Created by New Zealand POWs in Milwitz working camp, Poland, the newspaper provided an opportunity to discuss and network with their fellow POWs. Articles varied from sports results to reviews of the camps in which men had been held. Gallichan, the paper’s editor, often provided a snapshot of the men’s morale. Gallichan noted that monotony

is, perhaps, the main curse of P.O.W. life. Under its oppressive heaviness we generally find there is promoted a feeling akin to desperation from which it is most difficult to win relief.... We all have our own little methods of doing this, but, to a great extent, these ways and means are provided by those stout-hearted fellows who arrange all the details, and do all the spade work, of community entertainment.¹²⁰

Gallichan suggested that hobbies were necessary distractions which helped POWs cope with their captivity. He noted that most of these activities were organised by a few men. Gallichan implied that if not for those men’s efforts, the rest of the POWs would have succumbed to the monotony of captivity. It was remarkable that entertainment and academic pursuits took place in the camp space. These

¹¹⁸ King, pp. 263-64.

¹¹⁹ King, p. 263.

¹²⁰ *The Tiki Times: A Souvenir Booklet of the Camp Newspaper for Prisoners-of-War* (Palmerston North: Keeling & Mundy Ltd, 1950), p. 35.

areas were often dreary and foreign, but the efforts of some POWs shaped the camps into more comfortable places. Many of the resources used in leisure pursuits were provided by the Red Cross, with Gallichan noting that the items the prisoners received were ‘the tangible things upon which is built the whole structure of our community entertainment.’¹²¹

Private Wesley Jack, who was a writer for the paper, recalled that:

Every week the *Tiki Times* was put up on the notice board in the huts. All handwritten. It was news from all around the world that we gleaned from the 600-odd men’s letters. We got the racing results in New Zealand and Australian: the Melbourne Cup was won by so and so. The rugby results. Plus articles. And when you’re very, very hungry your brain becomes very sharp, and some of the poems were really out of this world.¹²²

Jack noted how the paper connected the POWs to the world beyond the wire. The information was gathered from the men’s letters, which suggested a sharing of personal correspondence. His statement that the POWs were mentally hungry indicated that the men craved something that they could engage with. Reading the paper’s news and articles provided mental stimulus to them. For those moments when they were consumed by the paper, they escaped the drabness of captivity.

The distribution of a newspaper was telling of the collective identity that was established in these camp spaces. It was clear that a connected community existed in the camp, and that the men had agency over their spaces. The reconstruction of the camp space into an environment where POWs could play sport, read, write, perform and study, highlighted how the men combated the unnerving monotony of captivity. Although the spaces never became homely, the efforts of POWs made the camps more comfortable. Communal POW pursuits, like the *Tiki Times*, gave the POWs a purpose above their mandatory camp duties. The determination

¹²¹ *Tiki Times*, p. 41.

¹²² Hutching, p. 137.

to produce a weekly newspaper highlighted the POWs' wish to stay connected with one another. It also allowed readers to express themselves, first through letters to the editor, then by the expansion of article content. Through sharing experiences in captivity, POWs created a shared narrative that linked them, while distancing themselves from their captors. Expression also took the form of hope for the future, with many POWs questioning where they would fit in a post-war world.

The *Tiki Times* became an outlet for the POWs' frustrations, in which they vented about camp life. A POW writing under the pseudonym "Kohle" expressed how the paper provided a channel of communication for the men. Kohle stated:

We've just looked at the Tiki Times
Down at the cookhouse door;
But, though we've looked for all the signs,
We cannot find a flaw.

It's just the thing we've wanted here,
An outlet for our woes;
It's just the place where we can leer
At all our 'lager' foes.¹²³

The author noted that he viewed the paper as a safe outlet for the POWs' frustrations. Whether the POWs were sharing stories or complaining about camp conditions, the paper provided an opportunity for expression and creativity. The prisoners were often subordinate to their captors, but the paper was under their control, they determined what articles it contained. Moreover, in the dreary camp space, when people felt isolated, the weekly circulation of news and articles was something to look forward to. It was a shared experience which reminded POWs that they were not alone.

¹²³ *Tiki Times*, p. 8.

The freedom of expression that these circulations provided the men was invaluable. At another prison camp, Robertson recalled being part of a creative writing projected. He stated:

I have just completed a short story of 3000 words, for a magazine which is being compiled called the *Outcrop*. Anyone can contribute articles. I expect some of the work will be excellent. My story will probably have to be cut in half. It is a fishing story and I am calling it *Hook, Line and Sinker*.¹²⁴

Although these projects may have been infrequent, it was noteworthy that they existed. They showed a need for POWs to express themselves and connect with others. Sharing stories and emotion not only bonded the men, but also helped to shape a shared narrative. Thus, the camp space was transformed from a desolate, foreign environment into a more habitable community.

In the oppressing prison space, the ability for POWs to vent was comforting. The newspaper forged an invaluable connection among the men, and although it was written by New Zealanders, its readership was not exclusive to New Zealanders. In a letter to the editor, POW Phil Evans complained that the paper tended to emphasise the narratives of New Zealanders, and that its biased perspectives were creating international tensions in the camp.¹²⁵ Gallichan tried to alleviate these concerns by stating that the paper was published to cater for everybody.¹²⁶ Still, the papers' humorous articles and opinions more than likely touched a nerve with certain nationalities. In the aftermath of the Allied landings in Normandy 1944, the paper responded to men's newfound optimism by saying 'Don't tell us the British move quickly – it has taken them nearly nine hundred years to get into Normandy.'¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Robertson, p. 112.

¹²⁵ *Tiki Times*, p. 52.

¹²⁶ *Tiki Times*, p. 57.

¹²⁷ *Tiki Times*, p. 3.

Similar to the experiences of those in Milwitz camp, Morris noted the presence of newspapers at Biberach camp, and that, ‘Social intercourse does exist – something like in a small town. I do say again that extent such intercourse and as organised community exists would surprise many who have not had such an experience.’¹²⁸ At Biberach, the POWs had access to both outside and camp newspapers. In regards to the German papers, Morris observed that they were ‘interpreted and news bulletins are read to us each evening – an amenity which we appreciate very much indeed.’¹²⁹ It was important to recognise that these papers gave the POWs insight into the outside world, and although they were filled with propaganda, the connection that they enabled beyond the confines of the camp was valued. The camp newspaper, like the *Tiki Times*, gave POWs the ability to circulate news amongst themselves.¹³⁰

In summary, the establishment of leisure activities gave POWs a platform to contest the prison space. Although prisoners endured immense boredom and physical restrictions, many accounts reveal an enthusiasm for sports. These moments of strength and mobility were a brief diversion from the men’s restricted existence. While simple at first, these pursuits developed into complex activities that pitted prisoners against one another in international competitions. These organised games were played in front of passionate spectators, who noted that the contests were welcome distractions from captivity. Moreover, sports transformed the camp space into a familiar place resembling a playing field or arena. The sports field became a safe place, where prisoners interacted with one another and forgot about the wire surrounding them.

As with sports, theatre thrived in the camps. In the oppressive camp space, performances were outlets for expression and creativity. And like sports grounds, the stage was a physical place where men could shed their identities as prisoners and take on the persona of someone else. Furthermore, theatrical performances

¹²⁸ Morris, Transcript Diary, p. 19.

¹²⁹ Morris, Transcript Diary, p. 22.

¹³⁰ Morris, Transcript Diary, p. 22.

were communal activities that required prisoners to work together to produce something tangible. Shows benefited not only the audience, but also those involved in planning and performing the shows; they enjoyed providing a brief distraction for their fellow prisoners.

While sports and theatrical performances emphasised the recreation of a familiar physical space, POWs used activities like reading, writing and other creative ventures to mentally escape captivity. This thesis has argued that these mental activities were crucial to the men's ability to cope with the monotony of captivity. Through reading, men experienced sensations that were lost in captivity; they were enthralled by tales of love, kindness, warmth and freedom. Similarly, the large collection of diaries, letters and memoirs written show that men were able to write in captivity. Writing was an outlet for prisoners to try and comprehend their situation; men felt comfortable unloading their fears in their journals. Moreover, unlike the communal experience of sports or theatre, reading and writing were individual activities. They were solitary pursuits where POWs enjoyed brief moments of privacy.

Whether it was through sports, academic study, theatre or the circulation of camp newspapers, the men used these pursuits to escape the daily grind of captivity. In most cases, these activities were set up and controlled by prisoners. The guards were present, but they were in the background, while the POWs took centre stage. This chapter has emphasised that men used leisure activities to resist their captivity and mentally escape the camp space. Activities became enclaves where POWs could leave behind their apprehension, and engage in something fresh and empowering.

Chapter Four - Labour, Smokes and Hunger: The Economy of POW Camps

The sudden change from participation in self-satisfying projects to forced labour under the Nazi yoke can be likened to a cold shower upon an unprepared body.¹

Working for the enemy raised significant identity issues for prisoners. Many POWs were confronted by the change from soldier to captive to worker. New Zealand POWs like Padre John Ledgerwood expressed their distress upon being forced to work for the enemy. As the opening quotation suggests, Ledgerwood felt he lost another aspect of his individuality. In the permanent camps, he was contained within the prison boundaries, but he was able to structure his day around activities that were enjoyable. However, while he was working for the enemy, Ledgerwood lost this agency, thereby adding more anguish and dispossession to the experience of an already dislocating space. This chapter explores the emotional impact that working for the enemy had on the men and the ways in which they tried to resist being labelled as willing workers. Compared to the stasis of permanent camps, some prisoners looked forward to the physical activity of work. However, most POWs were aware that their efforts on work assignments were beneficial to the enemy war effort and this knowledge caused significant anxiety within the prison space. Although beneficial to some individuals, forced labour divided POWs and created animosities, especially toward those who volunteered for work assignments.

In addition to the exploration of the POWs' work camp experiences, this chapter examines the economy within a POW camp. Hunger and deprivation were constant themes in the POW experience. The images of men suffering from a lack of food and other supplies have dominated many histories of the subject.

¹ John Ledgerwood, *Stalag XVIII A Wolfsburg*, MS-Papers-5644-3, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 24.

However, less attention has been given to how camp supplies affected the wider POW economy. This chapter examines how the volatility of the supply network impacted the men's emotions. It also analyses the construction of POW hierarchies, which were based on rank, wealth, and relationships with the enemy.

While imprisoned, many POWs were forced to work for the enemy in a variety of jobs. Providing labour and, in effect, helping the enemy war effort was a deeply confronting experience that influenced the prison space. There have been several attempts to explain how and why men were put to work for the enemy. Historian Gerald Davis provided an eloquent study of maintenance costs that prisoners imposed on their captors and stressed that the captors could diminish these costs by putting the prisoners to work.² Davis argued that post-war narratives of POWs were challenging because many became workers who helped the enemy economy, and that for these men their 'greatest historical impact may indeed be to benefit the enemy.'³ Although he made this argument, Davis noted that POWs were notoriously poor workers, limiting their productive value.⁴ Still, for those individuals who spent years in captivity, working for the enemy was a large part of their wartime experience.

Australian historian Peter Monteath opined that labour histories of POWs in European camps have been neglected because of the dominance of media coverage representing the men 'confined to their camps, passing their time at leisure, occasionally focussing their energies on planning and executing cunning escape plans so as to outwit a guileless foe.'⁵ Moreover, Monteath argued that the POW experiences in work camps were crucial to understanding the power relationships at play while in captivity, because working conditions were extraordinarily diverse.⁶ His study tried to rectify the perception that POWs were in a state of

² Gerald H. Davis, 'Prisoners of War in Twentieth-Century War Economies', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 12 (1977), p. 627.

³ Davis, p. 623.

⁴ Davis, p. 630.

⁵ Peter Monteath, 'Australian POW labour in Germany in World War II', *Labour History*, 103 (2012), pp. 83.

⁶ Monteath, p. 84.

stasis and that ‘work experiences of Australians in Germany will show that indeed POW labour was a dynamic phenomenon, changing with the course and conditions of war.’⁷ Monteath’s suggestion that the POW experience featured far greater mobility than has been previously documented is similar to this thesis’ examination of how prisoners coped with captivity. The following examples illustrate the vastly different working conditions, and their impact on the camp space.

Over the course of the war POWs were employed in a variety of jobs, and many New Zealanders found themselves working on Italian farms. Private Alf Rawlings recalled being sent to a ‘farm about twenty miles from Venice. We were housed in a large barn, surrounded by barbed wire.’⁸ From there, Rawlings laboured in ‘general farm work such as hoeing crops and making hay stacks.’⁹ New Zealand author Ken Fenton examined the accounts of Kiwi POWs in Italy, and in doing so he documented that many men had beneficial experiences in work camps.¹⁰ Fenton argued that after being contained in cramped prison spaces ‘most Kiwi prisoners felt that Campo 57 was a good place to get away from, and the work camps offered a way out, despite some reluctance to directly or indirectly support the Italians’ war effort.’¹¹ Fenton’s suggestion that working allowed men a way of escaping their monotonous and restricting permanent camps was similar to the accounts of POWs who this thesis has examined. Warrant Officer Charles Croall noted in his memoir that the greater mobility that work camps provided brought relief and that, ‘It was very exciting to be in a train travelling to another part of the country and being escorted by the enemy, even though we were ostensibly to work for them.’¹² Although these journeys share the uncertainty of the men’s initial movement from transit camps to permanent facilities, in these cases the POWs seemed to revel in a newfound sense of adventure. An almost tourist identity emerged from the men’s accounts, with them noting their enjoyment in

⁷ Monteath, p. 84.

⁸ Alf Rawlings, *Diary of Life in a Stalag* (Timaru: Alf Rawlings, 1991), p. 26.

⁹ Rawlings, p. 26.

¹⁰ Ken Fenton, *Alamein to the Alps: War in the Piedmont with Mission Cherokee and the Lost ANZACS 1943-45* (Nelson: Frontier Press, 2011)

¹¹ Fenton, p. 218.

¹² Charles Croall, “You! Croall?” (Tauranga: Brian Riggir Computers, 2010), p. 113.

seeing another part of Europe. Croall's recollection showed that working for the enemy was confronting, but it allowed men to break up the monotony of camp life.

Similar to Croall's excitement of being beyond the wire, Private Jack Caundle explained to his family the benefits of working at P.G. 107/2, Italy:

You will of course note the new address, we are in a working camp at present and thoroughly enjoying it, after a long period of inactivity I find a little work is a grand thing, the weather here at present is marvellous, I can notice the change in myself, you will probably notice a change also¹³

Caundle noted how his change in lifestyle from a sedentary prisoner to active worker was enjoyable. After being mentally drained by the inactivity of captivity, he suggested that working was refreshing. While many work assignments wore on the prisoners, physically and mentally, there were moments when working was an escape from captivity. The structure of work life reminded POWs of their lives before the war.

Even though the transition from permanent camps to working assignments was disconcerting to many POWs, in certain instances the men enjoyed greater freedoms while working. In particular, prisoners were able to fraternise with the local population. POW George Landon-Lane recalled working at a timber mill in Austria, and how the locals reacted to their presence. He noted:

How these children enjoyed sweets if given to them. They were like little boys and girls the world over, yet the advent of Hitler had denied them much even to the extent of a little candy. Now we come to the grown girls, the opposite sex always holds attraction for the soldier throughout all lands. Austria was not an exception,

¹³ Jack Caundle, Letter Collection, MS-Papers-10115-1, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, Undated letter, PG 107/2.

but being prisoners we were not allowed to mix with them. Still, on a Sunday, our eyes would always turn and follow them as they walked along the roads.¹⁴

Landon-Lane's statement that the local children were deprived of simple luxuries, like candy, suggested that Hitler's Germany was restricting both the POWs and the locals. By reintroducing candy into this area, the POWs helped to lessen the isolation that these communities endured. Although these interactions gave some power back to the POWs, their inability to interact with the local women reminded them of their prisoner status.

While Landon-Lane had favourable interactions with the locals, he also expressed that he 'found the civilian bosses the worst to work under. The German soldier was a much better man to deal with.'¹⁵ Furthermore, the different experiences of POWs on working parties highlights that no two tales were the same. Many POWs had moments where they enjoyed their time away from the monotonous routine of the permanent camps, but they also endured periods of unpleasantness. This duality is an important aspect of the POW experience, especially when captivity lasted for several years.

Similar to Landon-Lane's enjoyable interactions with civilians, Lance Corporal George Perry fondly remembered working on a farm and his flirtations with one of the farmer's daughters. Perry noted how working became easier because 'there were Mitzi's brown eyes to look into, and to pay compliments to in my bad German when nobody else was near, and watch her cheeks bloom like ripe peaches.'¹⁶ Although he was working for the enemy, these interactions were pleasant moments when the restrictions of captivity faded. However, their

¹⁴ George Landon-Lane, *Barbed Embrace: A travel series of adventure while the author was overseas and also a prisoner of war* (Blenheim: B. Mooney, 1986), p. 58.

¹⁵ Landon-Lane, p. 90.

¹⁶ George Perry, Unpublished Manuscript, MS-Papers-4346-1, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, 'To plough and sow and heap and mow'.

relationship deteriorated when Perry became upset with his boss's constant demands. He noted discussing his issue with the guard:

The guard suggested I change farms and work for someone less demanding. I was so angry that I did just that, but when I had cooled down, I regretted it. My pleasant secret flirtation with Mitzi was at an end, for although the farms were reasonably close, I was only able to see her on odd occasions and never alone. Much of the sparkle left life with the change.¹⁷

Perry's impulsive decision to resist the working camp's authority resulted in him being moved to another farm. He noted how he regretted the decision because it meant that he could no longer talk with Mitzi. While these flirtations appeared to be quite innocent, conversing with her made captivity more bearable. After the shift, while he could still see Mitzi, he suggested that being unable to speak freely with her was another reminder of the restrictions of captivity.

While Landon-Lane and Perry had favourable experiences interacting with the locals, Lance Corporal Tony Vercoe recalled his time working on a farm at P.G. 107/5, Italy:

Many civilians lived and worked on this property, but were usually kept well clear of us. Only at harvest time and during haymaking did we find ourselves working alongside them and, though clearly curious about us and not unfriendly, they kept their distance.¹⁸

Rather than engaging with the locals, Vercoe's group was isolated from these communities. Interactions between POWs and civilians were limited because both sides viewed the other as strange. This developed into an almost voluntary separation which reinforced the POWs' identity as captives in a foreign land.

¹⁷ Perry, 'To plough and sow and heap and mow'.

¹⁸ Tony Vercoe, *Yesterdays Drums: Echoes from the Wasteland of War* (Wellington: Steele Roberts Ltd, 2001), p. 115.

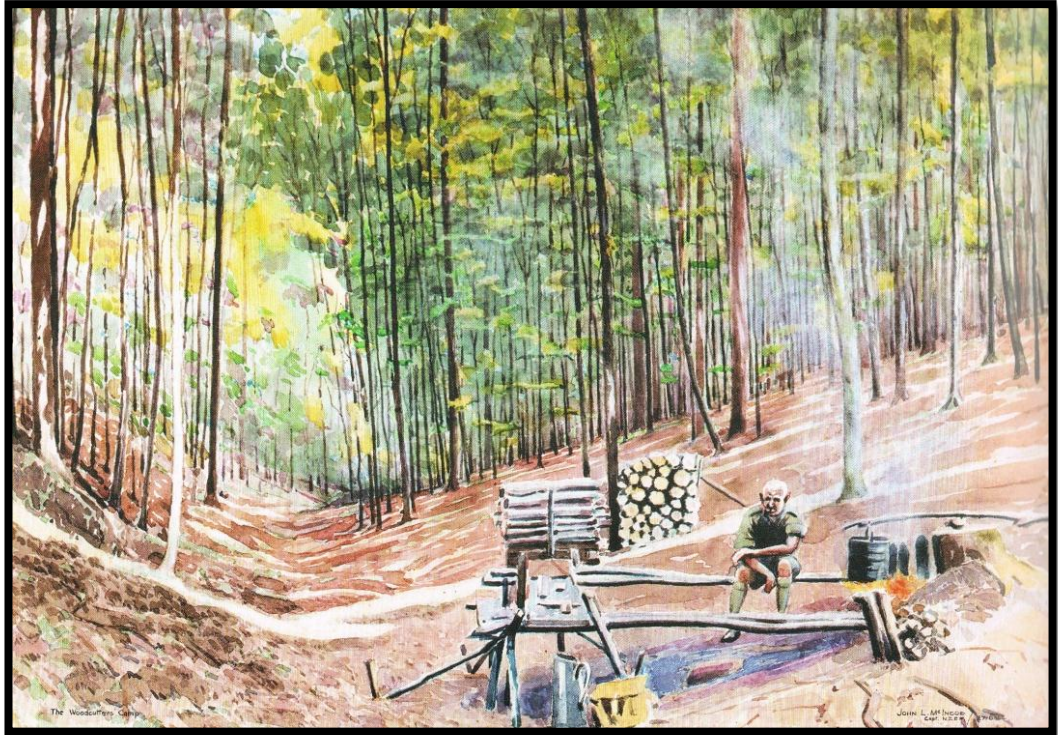


Figure 4.1. *The woodcutter's camp*.¹⁹

Captain John McIndoe was involved in a more pleasant working camp, which he illustrated himself in figure 4.1. The serene landscape alluded to a simpler, more colonial lifestyle where men were required to contest their space with nature. The neatly stacked chopped wood emphasised the production of the man's labour, while he rested next to the open fire. McIndoe's portrayal of the woodcutter's camp provided a stark contrast to life in permanent camps, which were dominated by barbed-wire and watchtowers. There are no guards depicted, which implies he had a sense of freedom. Furthermore, the image explained the motivation of some New Zealand POWs to want to work for the enemy. With the only alternative being to sit and wallow in a monotonous and depressing camp space, it is no wonder that working camps, with their sometimes tranquil scenery, came to be seen as an escape from those restricted confines.

¹⁹ John McIndoe, *The woodcutter's camp*, watercolour, AAAC 898 NCWA 205, Archives New Zealand.

Far from the tranquil scenery of farms and forests, some prisoners endured horrific conditions while working in coal mines. Private Jack Gallichan was part of a group who were employed in mining operations. Gallichan noted the bleakness of his camp at Klimintow, Poland:

There is no view worth mentioning from this camp. There is the whiteness of snow over everything, the gaunt and bleak looking buildings that belong to the mine, the puffing engine that groans and snorts by the wire outside our door, and the terrible looking country that stretches away with the tall chimneys of other mines drifting their smoke into the winter air. It is one of those places that drag on one heavily, that one learns quickly to hate.²⁰

Similarly, at Milwitz mining camp in Poland, he stated:

Coal, coal, coal. If I ever have anything to do with it when I get home I shall go crazy. To work in it, and with it, day after day, in surroundings that are uncongenial and unpleasant, and for our enemy, is an experience that one has to pass through to understand. There is no rest, no relaxation, just 'arbeit', boring, and unrelentless.²¹

His descriptions of his working environments were in stark contrast to the peaceful surrounds of Italian farm life. Smoke and noise constantly polluted the landscape. The mining industry seemed to never stop, moments of quiet reflection were few. The men's humanity was replaced by the machine-like symbolism of the groaning engine and endless chimneys. They were no longer individuals; instead, they were mere parts in the German war industry. Gallichan was also resentful of the bleakness of the mining camps. The 'gaunt' buildings personified the men's lean, almost starving existence. His despair was compounded by his working conditions, with him noting that, 'It was a lovely day when we went down [into the mine], and dark when we came up. It's hard to lose the friendliness of the sunshine like that.'²² His statement reflected how difficult it was to work in

²⁰ Jack Gallichan, *Barbed Wire Days*, MS-Papers-8910-01, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, pp. 278-79.

²¹ Gallichan, p. 399.

²² Gallichan, p. 321.

the mines, every day was like descending into the unknown. Moreover, there was little reprieve from the harsh work, with Gallichan stating that when he surfaced everyday he ‘felt that I had received a pardon, and had been set free from a condemned cell. Then I remembered I still hadn’t served my “sentence”. There are other days.’²³

Work assignments allowed POWs to exert their frustrations in the form of sabotage. Most accounts recount instances where the POWs disrupted the enemy war effort through poor work performance, or even destruction of supplies. Before examining these examples, it is important to note that the concept of sabotage fits comfortably into the narrative of fighting the enemy from behind the wire. In many cases it may be present in memoirs and interviews as a way of POWs justifying their captive experience. And although the tales of sabotage may be flavoured by the need to input an element of soldierly identity into their war story, it occurs too frequently in POW accounts to discount entirely.

Warrant Officer Jack Elworthy described his sabotage attempts, noting that he took ‘opportunities that came up – such as breaking any equipment we could find that wasn’t already broken. When we came across two boxes of radio valves one day, the man who found them stamped them into pieces.’²⁴ Similarly, Vercoe recalled in his memoir an instance when he and other POWs destroyed some of their factory equipment at Meissen, Germany. He remembered:

Pointless vandalism? It was. It was also an outlet for pent-up frustration, anger, aggression, even libido. Our masculine vigour and spirit were being displayed here and it was satisfying to see the girls up there watching the performance with interest.²⁵

Vercoe’s statement suggested that while he knew that his sabotage efforts were futile, it was satisfying to physically release his anger. Working a monotonous

²³ Gallichan, p. 312.

²⁴ Jack Elworthy, *Greece, Crete, Stalag, Dachau: A New Zealand Soldier’s Encounters with Hitler’s Army* (Wellington: Awa Press, 2014), p. 141.

²⁵ Vercoe, p. 181.

routine, day after day, stripped the men of their individualities. Striking out of this uniform behaviour, like Vercoe did, relieved stress and allowed POWs to express themselves. In Vercoe's case, he had an audience, and he was able to show them that he was not just a mindless worker, but a human being with personality and emotions.

The concept of performing poorly provided POWs with a stark contrast to what was expected of themselves before and after captivity. Warrant Officer Galbraith Hyde commented that:

One of the things that happened to you as a prisoner was the turning upside down of all your previously accepted values. This came home to me particularly out on a working party. It used to be 'good' to tell the truth, to work hard, to look after property, to not steal, to not be disruptive of the accepted values of the society within which you were living. When you were a prisoner however it became 'good' to lie, to destroy, to sabotage, to work as little as possible to be a thoroughly 'disruptive citizen' and to be 'disruptive of society.'²⁶

Hyde suggested that to be respected in the POW community, one had to be as troublesome as possible. Actions that were frowned upon in pre-war life, such as time-wasting and violence, were celebrated in captivity. Many POWs were confronted by this divergence from their accepted beliefs, but some saw it as an opportunity to continue fighting the enemy. This individualistic, destructive attitude allowed some POWs to form a collective identity where they positioned themselves against the guards. Hyde noted that POWs who engaged in these disruptive activities 'developed to a fine art the skill of being an utter bastard.'²⁷

²⁶ Galbraith Hyde, *The Personal Account of One Man's War 1939-1945*, MS-Papers-5290, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 62.

²⁷ Hyde, p. 62.

Many POWs expressed the need to do as little as possible, but recognised that this poor performance conflicted with their pride. Croall noted the small annoyances that were disruptive to the regular work routine, 'A lot of time was spent by us prisoners going to and coming from the toilet, amazing the number of times we needed to go. We did anything to avoid work.'²⁸ And although these efforts were common in POW accounts, Croall recalled that when working at a papermaking factory in the Sudetenland, 'Taking my time like I did was actually harder, but there was the satisfaction of beating the Germans at their own game.'²⁹ This concept of deliberately performing poorly, but feeling aspects of shame because of it, is an interesting side-effect of forced labour. POWs felt little motivation to work for the enemy, but labouring provided the opportunity for men to feel worthwhile again. Other than Red Cross parcels, the POWs were reliant on their captors to house and feed them. Working on a farm or a factory allowed the men to see the worth of their labour. And for some POWs, work provided them with a much needed boost to their self-esteem.

Camp authorities were aware that POWs might be inclined to perform poorly, and in many cases took steps to regulate this behaviour. Vercoe recalled an instance when he was working at a factory that produced building blocks. He deliberately made the mixture wrong, even after threats from the Germans to move him to a worse camp. Vercoe remembered that he was eventually 'isolated from the others in the quarry above, there to dig out gravel.'³⁰ Private Arthur Coe had a similar experience with camp authorities when he and others refused to work on one particular job. Coe remembered that

At the work site we refused to use picks and shovels. After many threats, and a lot of shouting we were eventually taken back to camp and told to pack our belongings. Shortly after, a guard

²⁸ Croall, p. 115.

²⁹ Croall, p. 127.

³⁰ Vercoe, p. 181.

walked in our barrack to tell us he was taking us back to Marburg on a charge of mutiny.³¹

When it was determined that Coe and the other POWs would be forced to return to the working camp, he faked an illness to avoid the assignment.³² Dodging work through illness, real or fake, was a common occurrence for POWs, especially for those men who were working unpleasant jobs. Sergeant John Hogg recalled that while working at the Milwitz coal mine:

Lives were humdrum and monotonous. After twelve months of working below, I decided to give myself a 'Kranker.' That was when one injured himself to get out of working for the Germans, and it was a common practice among POWs.³³

The POWs' capacity to exert limited agency in working camps was an important facet of the power relationships in captivity. The ability to decide how hard or even whether to work at all showed a considerable amount of agency that debunks the perception that POWs were static victims controlled completely by their captors. The accounts of New Zealand POWs emphasise that they were able to move easily between identity roles, such as workers or escape-orientated POWs. Throughout their captivity POWs were self-aware of their identity, and this awareness has filtered into the post-war captivity accounts, which largely explains why many POWs entertain readers with tales of sabotage. Revealing the POWs' mobility repositioned the narratives surrounding their ordeal because it showed that they had the ability to move between different camps, and in doing so they made small decisions which directly impacted their experience.

Many New Zealand POWs resented working because they were aware that their efforts were aiding the enemy war effort. Staff Sergeant John Hobbs noted in his diary that, 'Every man that works here in Germany is displacing a man who

³¹ Arthur Coe, Unpublished Manuscript, 2005.291, The Kippenberger Military Archive, Waiouru, New Zealand, p. 15.

³² Coe, p. 16.

³³ John Hogg, *An Honourable Surrender: A New Zealand Soldier Remembers* (Tauranga: Bay Officer Centre Printers Ltd, 1992), p. 59.

becomes available for active service against the Allies, and to this extent the Allied war effort is being set back.’³⁴ Landon-Lane had a similar experience when he was sent to work on a railway. He argued that:

None of us had any intention of getting down to serious work on this job. We felt that keeping a railway serviced was in a way a direct method of helping the enemy gain his supplies and perhaps too allowing him more men for the frontline.³⁵

The experiences of these POWs expressed the loss of agency that the men endured while in captivity. While those who were in permanent camps could spend their days in their individual and communal activities, those in working parties had to labour for the enemy, with little alternative. Not only did these men have to suffer the humiliation of working menial jobs, but also they did so knowing that they were helping the enemy war effort. This must have been a distressing situation for many POWs, especially those still dealing with the shame of capture.

Working for the enemy was a constant point of contention within the camp space, and it was prevalent in creating division between officers and regulars. Under the Geneva Convention, officers could not be forced to work, but regulars had no choice. Australian historian Michael Caulfield was critical of the inequality that these rules created during the POW experience, noting that:

The international law known as the Geneva Convention, which governed the treatment of prisoners of war, was originally drawn up by men from the privileged classes and its clauses continued that very same privilege to officers. Men of rank did not have to work and received greater amounts of pay for work from their captors than the ordinary soldier.³⁶

³⁴ John Hobbs, *Diary*, MS-Papers-3958-2, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 94.

³⁵ Landon-Lane, p. 75.

³⁶ *War Behind the Wire: Australian Prisoners of War*, ed. by Michael Caulfield (Sydney: Hachette Australia, 2008), p. 50.

Despite these work restrictions, instances of New Zealand officers willingly working for the enemy were not uncommon. Ledgerwood recalled the bitterness he felt toward the officers who volunteered for work.

In the first place it split the N.C.O body into two schools of thought and drove the first wedge into what had been an undivided loyalty. In the second place it caused friction between the N.C.O.s and the other ranks at the very time we needed a solid front against Jerry's insatiable appetite for workers. Lastly, it reduced the number of desirable camps to which O.R.s, who had to work, could be sent.³⁷

The differences between being forced to work and volunteering divided the camp space, providing another factor for the POWs to brood over. Some men, like Hobbs, were very hostile toward those who volunteered. Hobbs noted in his diary:

No blame whatsoever can be attached to all prisoners under the rank of full corporal for these men can be made to work in other than war occupations under the Geneva Convention. However my feelings are very strong against those N.C.O's who volunteer for work, and for them I can muster no sympathy or friendship.³⁸

Similar to Ledgerwood, Hobbs' resentment toward volunteers was founded on the belief that the 'Germans always give good treatment to volunteer N.C.O's and usually send them out to Kommandos where conditions are the best.'³⁹ Therefore, those who had no choice in working for the enemy were forced to labour in the most deplorable and dangerous jobs. Private Ernest Clarke noted that when work became available 'there were opposing points of view and much soul searching as to the rights and wrongs of helping enemy war effort in any manner'.⁴⁰

³⁷ Ledgerwood, p. 26.

³⁸ Hobbs, p. 94.

³⁹ Hobbs, p. 94.

⁴⁰ Ernest Clarke, *Over the Fence is Out* (Papakura: E. Clarke, 1987), p. 36.

Likewise Private Ross Maxwell noted how prisoners struggled with the decision whether to work or refuse assignments:

Briefly, everyone is trying to decide which comes first, duty to one's self, or to one's country. On the one hand we're offered extra grub, and God knows we need it badly enough, and on the other there's the disquieting thought that we're helping the enemy.⁴¹

In an environment of food scarcity, the possibility of greater rations was a powerful incentive for men to work. Working for the enemy was demeaning, but sometimes the extra food was necessary for survival. Maxwell's reference to God implied that those who decided to work would not be judged or punished.

The internal competition for the best work assignments was a constant frustration for many POWs. Warrant Officer R.H. Thomson expressed his resentment at those men who were willing to work for the enemy for their individual benefit. He remembered:

They angled their way into demeaning jobs. They hadn't been press ganged – they asked. They had then used their influence and worked their friends into the racket. The answer was, of course, that they had an occupation; they weren't just sitting around rotting – and they were being fed!⁴²

Thomson's statement highlighted the dual incentives of working while in captivity. Being assigned work was beneficial to the POWs' self-worth because it provided men with a productive outlet to fill the endless hours of captivity. POWs spent time pursuing leisure activities, but working afforded the men a distinct responsibility that they could structure their lives around. Perhaps more importantly, POWs were provided with more food when on work assignments. These extra supplies helped to alleviate concerns about assisting the enemy war effort.

⁴¹ Ross Maxwell, Typescript Diary, MS-Papers-4401-7, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, 10 March 1943.

⁴² R.H. Thomson, *Captive Kiwi* (Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs Limited, 1964), p. 32.

In addition to the issue of working for the enemy, being drafted into a working party, and leaving the confines of the permanent camp for an unknown period of time, provided another level of uncertainty to the POW experience. POWs formed support networks within their camps, but the prospect of work assignments proved destabilising, with men being separated from their friends and being forced to reintegrate with a new group. Lance Bombardier Jim Henderson summarised what it was like seeing men being drafted into a working party, and the prospect of leaving friendships behind:

As for tonight, the Kiwi community resolutely has blacked-out the unhappy thought that this will mean the breaking up of many true friendships, formed through the common hardships endured together in Libyan prisoner-of-war camps, through shipwreck and stark misery on the Greek coast.⁴³

In another instance, Vercoe was forced to work on a farm in Italy, and he recalled, 'I'd been looking around our group and wondering how we'd been selected. There were a few vaguely familiar faces but not mates; no-one I knew well. Yet again it would mean a fresh start.'⁴⁴ Work rosters and the shifting of men away from permanent camps was also dislocating for those men left behind. Hogg recalled that his friend left for a work assignment, and that he 'sadly watched him leave. I never saw him again. None of the original men I'd entered the army with were now with me.'⁴⁵ These accounts of movement highlight that POWs exhibited a degree of mobility that has been neglected in many histories of the subject. Furthermore, the mobility of some POWs, like those who were forced to work for the enemy, compared to those who had to stay in permanent camps, helped to shape a space that remained uncertain for the POWs. As previous chapters of this thesis have shown, the camps provided men with leisure activities that reminded POWs of happier, pre-war lives. However, the prospect of constant movement, and the uncertainty of whether or not support networks would remain intact, reinforced the captor-over-captive power relationship.

⁴³ Jim Henderson, *Gunner Inglorious* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 131.

⁴⁴ Vercoe, p. 113.

⁴⁵ Hogg, p. 54.

Although most POWs recognised that by working for the enemy they were helping the Axis war effort, the incentives for providing this labour was too much to pass up. The extra supplies were necessary to the men's survival because many camps were under supplied. The captors were required by the Geneva Convention to provide a basic amount of rations for the POWs, but by all accounts these were severely insufficient.⁴⁶ Major Archie MacDuff noted in his diary that his camp's meagre rations were

alleged by the Germans to be the same as that supplied to depot troops stipulated in the Geneva Convention. In point of fact it is a mythical scale because they have no troops which really come into this category, because as soon a German soldier does anything at all other than sleep, he goes on to a much higher scale.⁴⁷

MacDuff's experience was reflected in other New Zealand POW accounts, which were adamant that food scarcity was prevalent in the camp space. In almost every diary or memoir, food was a dominant theme, with Lieutenant Daniel Riddiford contending, 'It is quite certain that if Sigmund Freud had ever been in a prison camp he would have revised his views about sex being at the bottom of everything; believe me, hunger can be a far stronger craving.'⁴⁸ Riddiford's statement highlighted the POWs' overriding need for food. In the camp space, the scarcity of food dominated the men's thoughts. Food became a constant discussion point, with many POWs keeping notes on what they were consuming on a daily basis. And when they were not eating, they were thinking about food. Discussions about their favourite meals, and what they were going to eat after their release dominated talks about the future.

⁴⁶ Mark Webster and Paul Luker, *Parcels from Home: The POW Parcel Scheme and the New Zealand Red Cross in World War II* (Auckland: CreativeTech Ltd Publishing, 2015), p. 62.

⁴⁷ Archie Peter MacDuff, Diary, 1999.1089, The Kippenberger Military Archive, Waiouru, New Zealand, Book 12, pp. 15-16.

⁴⁸ Daniel Riddiford MC, *Committed to Escape: A New Zealand Soldier's Story* (Martinborough: Ruamahanga Press Ltd, 2004), p. 40.

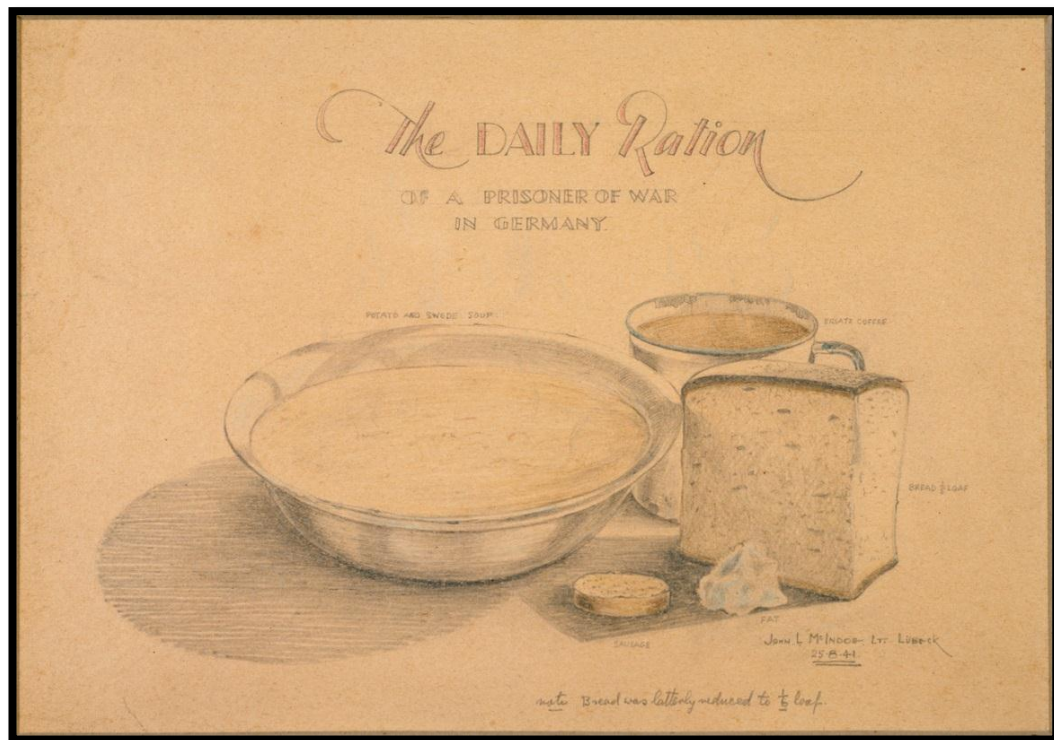


Figure 4.2. *The daily ration of a prisoner of war in Germany.*⁴⁹

The daily ration illustrated in figure 4.2. was indicative of the poor food supply in POW camps. The image shows that POWs were given a slice of bread, a piece of sausage and a bowl of watered down potato soup. Although there were times when more filling food was provided, this small parcel of food was the basis of the POWs' diet. Men supplemented these rations with other items from personal or Red Cross parcels, but this merely made a bad situation slightly better. MacDuff noted that before eating, he dreamed of the nutritious and flavoursome meals of the past, but was often 'brought to earth again with a jolt when the German lunch of soup and mashed potato was set before me.'⁵⁰

Food scarcity affected the prison space by providing an atmosphere where POWs looked after themselves, rather than banding together for the common good. Private Francis Nops recalled that, 'Hunger shows up men's true selves. The tins our macaroni is cooked in are besieged as soon as empty and spoons and hands

⁴⁹ John McIndoe, *The daily ration of a prisoner of war in Germany*, pencil/crayon on paper, AAAC 898 NCWA 204, Archives New Zealand.

⁵⁰ MacDuff, Book 14, p. 11.

scrape around the edges for scraps. The men are like animals.’⁵¹ Nops’ statement was revealing because he noted that the POWs’ primitive, almost animal behaviour was a truer reflection of the men’s identities. He suggested that those who were willing to scavenge every last scrap were less human than those who waited patiently for their meals. However, rather a negative reflection on the men’s scavenging behaviour, fighting for every last bit of food emphasised the deprivation that many POWs faced. Nops indicated that some men did not need to resort to these desperate measures. But for POWs who were suffering, the need to survive overshadowed notions of public civility.

Most POW histories and accounts detail in great length the impact malnutrition had on the camp experience. POWs were given a parcel from the Red Cross at irregular intervals to supplement their meagre camp rations. Parcels were packed and shipped from many Allied countries, including New Zealand. New Zealand authors Mark Webster and Paul Luker completed a comprehensive study of the role of the New Zealand Red Cross in World War Two, including how parcels were sent to POWs. Webster and Luker noted that:

Already by the end 1941, the gathering and sending of Red Cross parcels to prisoners had become a massive enterprise. The New Zealand Society was handling over 6000 parcels per week, to cater to the aim of one parcel per prisoner per week for the duration.⁵²

These parcels were then shipped from Wellington to Red Cross stations around the globe.⁵³ Even though the New Zealand branch of the Red Cross produced parcels, Webster and Luker noted that ‘it’s wrong to imagine the New Zealand POWs exclusively received New Zealand-origin parcels. Allied POWs received parcels from any Allied country’s Red Cross branches, depending on what was delivered where.’⁵⁴

⁵¹ Francis Nops, Transcript Diary, 2008.283, The Kippenberger Military Archive, Waiouru, New Zealand, p. 3.

⁵² Webster and Luker, p. 41.

⁵³ Webster and Luker, p. 124.

⁵⁴ Webster and Luker, p. 25.

Many factors impacted the supply of these parcels, including the Allied war efforts. Private Dudley Muff noted that:

Now there is a little matter which is causing no little concern and that is the effect of the R.A.F's activities on our food and fuel supply. It is no wonder we are on half a parcel a week, when these mosquitoes start dropping bombs on trains and things.⁵⁵

Muff revealed how the men's self-interests sometimes ran counter to the wider Allied war effort. Allied advances boosted morale, but they also disrupted supply routes to the camps. POWs had to balance their patriotism with their present needs for survival. As Muff noted, when camp supplies were scarce, rather than seen as friendly saviours, the air force was re-positioned as pesky irritants who were making camp life tougher, at least in the short term.

The volatility of supply had a considerable impact on the men's emotional state. Uncertainty was always prevalent in the camp space, but when it came to a disruption in the supply of food, the space became dominated by a sense of depression. As the tide of the war turned increasingly in the Allies' favour, supply issues became more common, with Corporal Fred Stuckey recalling that in 1945

this camp's moods change with every wind. Two days ago a more pleasant atmosphere could not have been found anywhere, because of the half issue of a parcel. Today because other expected trucks have not turned up yet, the boys are down in the blues again, even though there are still enough parcels in the camp to give every man half a parcel for the next two weeks.⁵⁶

Moreover, Corporal John Quinlan noted in a letter home that 'This life behind wire on short rations get[s] you down a lot but must keep cheerful somehow.'⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Dudley Muff, *Alison's Book*, 2005.420, The Kippenberger Military Archive, Waiouru, New Zealand, p. 50.

⁵⁶ Fred Stuckey, *Sometimes Free: My Escapes from German P.O.W. Camps* (Ashhurst: J. Stuckey, 1977), p. 161.

⁵⁷ John Quinlan, Diary, MSX-2732-2734, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, 14-5-1942.

Private Noel Masters summed up his situation in 1945 in a similar manner, with the camp becoming a ‘very miserable place at present with no grub and no smokes.’⁵⁸

Although food scarcity proved depressing for POWs, there were times when their morale was boosted by the unexpected arrival of additional supplies. Masters noted the difference in the men’s emotional state from low rations to fresh supplies, ‘What a contrast from last nights tea of 4 potatoes boiled without salt. Tonight we had “Brunch” pork meat & beans, cake, tea etc. – Felt like a kid at Xmas.’⁵⁹ Masters revealed that the men’s emotions were closely connected to the supply of food. The arrival of supplies, and with them the ability to produce bigger, more diverse meals, boosted the POWs’ morale. Masters commented that the influx of supplies often led to celebratory meals where the men revelled in their newfound wealth. However, his suggestion that these events were similar to Christmas indicated that the POWs were aware that these moments were fleeting, and that they would soon transition back to basic rations and food shortages.

Even when the parcels arrived at their destination, it was not guaranteed that the POWs would receive all the contents. Parcels were delivered to camp authorities, who decided when, or if, to distribute them. Coe remembered that, ‘Misconduct, even in a distant prison camp could give our captors the excuse to stop issuing food parcels for a time.’⁶⁰ Furthermore, guards tampered with parcels to stop POWs hoarding the supplies. Hyde remembered that:

The contents were then passed item by item, each tin being punctured with a sharp tipped hammer. The purpose of this exercise was to make it impossible to stock pile canned food for the purpose of escape or such like.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Noel Masters, Transcript Diary, MS-Papers-7150, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, 26 January 1945.

⁵⁹ Masters, 13 March 1945.

⁶⁰ Coe, p. 23.

⁶¹ Hyde, p. 50.

Similarly, Muff recalled:

It is very sad dear, but very true, that the Germans open all the tins in our Red Cross Parcels. They do this because so many of the prisoners were saving up the food so they would have lots to eat when they escaped, now of course we can't save it up for it would go all smelly.⁶²

In these instances, the guards used the Red Cross parcels to exert their control over the POWs. Rather than allowing the men the freedom to determine when and how they would use their supplies, the guards made it difficult to collect food for use later, effectively restraining the supplies available to the men.

Disruptions to the supply of Red Cross parcels had a detrimental impact on the camp space because the parcels not only provided the necessities of life, but also contained luxury goods, such as chocolate and cigarettes. Captain John Richardson remembered, 'Wonder of all wonders, Red Cross parcels turned up a few weeks later, butter, wonderful Canadian biscuits, cheese, chocolate concentrate, meat, meat extract and Klim milk powder and this was the start on the road to recovery.'⁶³ Richardson suggested that these parcels provided much needed food and comfort. These extra supplies diversified and flavoured the men's meals, which helped to improve their physical well-being. Importantly, the parcels contained items that were familiar to the POWs and reminded them that they were not forgotten. Therefore, food provided both physical and mental sustenance.

The introduction of luxury goods into the camp space not only provided POWs with greater comforts, it also allowed POWs to trade unwanted goods for more desirable items. Sergeant Pilot Jack Hardie opined:

⁶² Muff, p. 2.

⁶³ John Richardson, Unpublished Manuscript, MS-Papers-10709, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 2.

Rackets flourished as well. Bribing the guards became commonplace. In our weekly food parcels were goodies now virtually unobtainable in Germany, except for the privileged. Cigarettes, coffee, chocolates and soap would buy bread, paper, batteries, film and an extraordinary range of other commodities and services. If the buyer had the price, almost anything was possible.⁶⁴

Hardie's revelation that the POWs had supplies that were not available to their captors, and that these goods could be used to bribe the guards, emphasised the power that these parcels gave to the POWs. Through barter and trade, POWs were able to get items which they could use to express their individuality, such as Hardie noting that paper and film were obtainable. Similarly, Vercoe recalled the parcels and 'the smokes made a real difference; gave us something to barter with too, among ourselves, sometimes with the guards.'⁶⁵

Cigarettes as a medium of exchange was a constant theme within the POWs' accounts, and this development was examined by former British POW and economist R.A. Radford. Radford argued that the economic activity in daily camp life was an example of pre-war social structures filtering into the camp space.⁶⁶ He contended that, 'Most trading was for food against cigarettes or other foodstuffs, but cigarettes rose from the status of a normal commodity to that of currency.'⁶⁷ Even though economic activity was beneficial to the men's physical well-being, Radford noted that trade also helped the men's mental state, especially when it came to their identity. He stated that, 'Everyone receives a roughly equal share of essentials; it is by trade that individual preferences are given expression and comfort increased. All at some time, and most people regularly, make exchanges of one sort or another.'⁶⁸ Furthermore, Radford explained why cigarettes came to be the main medium of exchange:

⁶⁴ Jack Hardie, *From Timaru to Stalag VIII B: A Kiwi Airman's Wartime Story* (Wellington: Steele Roberts Ltd, 2009), p. 175.

⁶⁵ Vercoe, pp. 109-10.

⁶⁶ R.A. Radford, 'The Economic Organisation of a P.O.W. Camp', *Economica*, 12, 48 (November 1945), p. 189.

⁶⁷ Radford, p. 190.

⁶⁸ Radford, pp. 189-90.

Although cigarettes as currency exhibited certain peculiarities, they performed all the functions of a metallic currency as a unit of account, as a measure of value and as a store of value, and shared most of its characteristics. They were homogeneous, reasonably durable, and of convenient size for the smallest or, in packets, for the largest transactions.⁶⁹

Radford explained that the recurring characteristic that allowed cigarettes to flourish as the medium of exchange was reliability. Although the supply of cigarettes varied, POWs trusted that they would retain their value. This gave POWs the confidence to trade current supplies for currency they could use to buy goods in the future.

Still, the economic system was far from perfect. Basing the means of exchange on one commodity meant that when the supply of cigarettes was disrupted, camp economies were adversely affected. Radford recalled the volatility of the market, contending that:

Several hundred thousand cigarettes might arrive in the space of a fortnight. Prices soared, and then began to fall, slowly at first but with increasing rapidity as stocks ran out, until the next big delivery. Most of our economic troubles could be attributed to this fundamental instability.⁷⁰

The uncertainty of the supply networks to POW camps resulted in periods of high inflation and deflation. These price fluctuations were experienced by many New Zealand POWs. Hobbs expressed his disgust at the volatility in his diary, noting that an 'Italian loaf of bread sold for 20 cigarettes on occasions and on others for 100 cigarettes. The economists aim stability of prices and exchange rates falls far short of achievement in a P.O.W camp!'⁷¹ Moreover, Hobbs argued that, 'prices here in camp are controlled by the economic principles of supply and demand as in any community, prices changing according to the amount of medium of

⁶⁹ Radford, p. 194.

⁷⁰ Radford, p. 195.

⁷¹ Hobbs, p. 34.

exchange – cigarettes – and of foodstuffs available.⁷² The purchasing power of cigarettes outlined by Hobbs was interesting, but it appears that the relative supply of food was more impactful on commodity prices. When food was readily available, trade could take place on reasonable terms. However, when food was scarce, cigarettes lost considerable value. Hobbs remembered the extent to which prices could fluctuate by noting the differences between his experiences in Italy and Germany. He stated that:

During the hungry days in Italy when food was scarce and cigarettes were comparatively plentiful, I have seen a two hundred gram loaf traded for a hundred cigarettes; while in the good times here in Germany the current price of an ordinary loaf ten times the weight has been twenty cigarettes⁷³

Cigarettes could also be traded for services from other POWs. Quinlan noted in his diary an instance when he had his watch ‘mended & cleaned for 8 fags.’⁷⁴

Economic activity provided POWs with the means to exchange goods, but, in many cases, it also hurt camp unity. New Zealand POW Jim Henderson remembered that while cigarettes became invaluable commodities, they ‘could, and did, break up friendships which had been formed and lasted through all other hardships of war.’⁷⁵ Radford had a similar experience of disunity, specifically when it came to trading with the enemy. He noted that:

A tiny minority held that all trading was undesirable as it engendered an unsavoury atmosphere; occasional frauds and sharp practices were cited as proof. Certain forms of trading were more generally condemned; trade with the Germans was criticised by many.⁷⁶

⁷² Hobbs, p. 102.

⁷³ Hobbs, p. 102.

⁷⁴ Quinlan, 16-5-1942.

⁷⁵ Henderson, p. 127.

⁷⁶ Radford, p. 199.

Radford argued that some POWs tried to change other men's behaviour by compelling them to work together, rather than for their own individual benefits. This minority of POWs who were anti-trade, blamed the competition for supplies for bringing inequality and crime into the camp space. Although most POWs ignored these warnings, it was revealing that trading with the guards was stigmatised. The concept of POWs judging each other's deals suggested an unspoken set of rules which inmates were expected to adhere to.

As the above examples have shown, the development of an internal camp economy highlights a desire to exert a form of individuality and power. Competition for supplies forced many POWs to adopt selfish tendencies, which led to social and economic inequalities emerging. Rather than a simple narrative of POWs banding together behind the wire, the men's accounts tell a more complicated story of deprivation and isolation. Private Peter Winter asserted that:

A prison camp where all started on an equal footing could have been an ideal setting for genuine socialism, but it did not work like that and very quickly social strata evolved. Non-commissioned officers had some standing, those employed in administration had more, while cooks were on a higher plain again.⁷⁷

Winter suggested that captivity should have been a fresh start for the POWs, one in which everyone remained relatively equal. His allusion to socialism reflected his expectations that POWs would work together for the good of their community. However, hierarchies quickly emerged in the camp space, and those who had authority before captivity, like non-commissioned officers, were reluctant to relinquish their power. For many POWs, the needs of the self, outweighed the needs of the many.

Ledgerwood's account of his POW experience was more romantic in terms of camp unity. He suggested that, 'The sorrows and sordidness of prisoner of war

⁷⁷ Peter Winter, *Free Lodgings: The true story of a Kiwi soldier's amazing bid for freedom* (Auckland: Reed Books, 1993), p. 104.

life were as much shared as were the joys and beauties.’⁷⁸ But in many other POW accounts, the men expressed disappointment and anger that class structures and selfishness came to dominate prison life. In most cases, the hierarchies that formed in the camp space came to control the men’s daily lives. POWs not only struggled to survive against the deprivation, but also when it came to food, a lack of communal spirit added to their woes. Stuckey simply summed up the POW mentality as, ‘Self first, self last, and self always.’⁷⁹ Similarly, MacDuff expressed his disbelief in many POWs attitudes in his diary:

A surprisingly large number have adopted the attitude of ‘Damn everybody else! I am alright.’ This attitude is expressed by the determination to be first in everything, to take everything that offers whether they need it or not, and to get more than their fair share⁸⁰

Although this selfishness existed, men formed small collectives to provide greater stability for themselves. However, not all took part in these systems, with Captain Walter Morris noting that, ‘Some officers buy for themselves – very selfish. This life brings out the best in some and the worst in others – shows true level.’⁸¹ Food syndicates provided men with an element of protection from the volatility of the market, and from each other. Muff noted that when the supply of Red Cross parcels were disrupted, the men had to ‘halve one with a mate’.⁸² Syndicates were a common feature in the POW experience, and their occurrence highlighted the need for POWs to depend on another. Historian Peter Doyle argued that these groups were beneficial to the men, but noted situations where bread would be cut up into equal portions and that, ‘Arguments would frequently break out, and syndicates break up over the small irregularities in the ritual cutting.’⁸³

⁷⁸ Ledgerwood, p. 11.

⁷⁹ Stuckey p. 50.

⁸⁰ MacDuff, Book 14, p. 20.

⁸¹ Walter Charles Morris, Transcript Diary, 1979/58, Waikato Museum, p. 2.

⁸² Muff, p. 11.

⁸³ Peter Doyle, *Prisoners of War in Germany* (Oxford: Shire Publications Ltd, 2008), p. 17.

Still, forming small groups allowed POWs an element of safety that was necessary in the confronting prison space. When circumstances resulted in extreme scarcity, prisoners became increasingly vulnerable to exploitation. British historian Simon MacKenzie argued that these economic support groups

soon proved to be the best way for other ranks to avoid going under in the more Darwinian columns. Syndicates, even if involving only two men, could engage in the necessary foraging, bargaining, and protection of possession more effectively than most single men. The appearance of these de facto gangs, however, might only intensify competition.⁸⁴

More disturbing than mere selfishness was the presence of prison gangs that terrorised other inmates. Elworthy recalled the formation of ‘one or two criminal gangs ... [that] used stand-over tactics to invade barrack rooms and steal food and cigarettes, or waylay small groups and rob them.’⁸⁵ This situation proved a problem for officers like Elworthy. He stated that if he could not protect the interests of his men, ‘they would either be robbed by gangs, or have to join a gang for self-protection.’⁸⁶ Captain John Borrie recalled a particularly unsettling incident when gangs were terrorising his camp at Lamsdorf, Borrie noted ‘They go to sleeping men, stealing wallets and watches from under their pillows. If they resist their faces are slashed.’⁸⁷

Although there were rare instances of gangs coercing POWs through violence, minor crimes such as petty theft were far more common. Quinlan noted in a letter home that, ‘Some hound pinched a tin of tea from me.’⁸⁸ This hostility was an important aspect as it highlighted that POWs were willing to steal the smallest commodities to benefit themselves in the short term. Petty theft became a constant talking point in the *Tiki Times*, a newspaper produced by New Zealand POWs at

⁸⁴ S.P. MacKenzie, *The Colditz Myth: British and Commonwealth Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 72.

⁸⁵ Elworthy, p. 170.

⁸⁶ Elworthy, p. 119.

⁸⁷ John Borrie, *Despite Captivity: A Doctor's Life as Prisoner of War* (New Zealand: Whitcoulls Limited, 1975), p. 214.

⁸⁸ Quinlan, 7-6-1942.

Milwitz working camp. The newspapers editors contended that because of the scarcity of supplies, they had ‘seen the depths to which man can sink when goaded by the spur of hunger.’⁸⁹ Particularly worrisome to the camp was the reoccurring claims that POWs were stealing men’s possessions from the camp’s bath house while they showered. This was especially apparent when the POWs were able to sell clothing for schnapps; the editors noted that ‘some dishonourable fellows have been selling their friends’ clothing, and their own souls as well, simply to satisfy a pathetic craving.’⁹⁰ The camp was implored to band together to identify the culprits, and tried to maintain aspects of their civilian identities. The paper noted, ‘You can help to lessen the gravity of the position by joining in a general effort to detect the individuals who are stealing articles intended to keep you and your mates warm during the coming winter.’⁹¹ Furthermore, the men at Milwitz were advised by the *Tiki Times* that:

When a community is threatened by people of low character it takes steps to see that these people are apprehended and dealt with. It rids itself of the menace by its own effort; it provides its own solution to the problem. Let this be the case here.⁹²

It was revealing how the men tried to police themselves, and highlighted how power was distributed in the camp. The POWs saw theft as an internal problem that they would deal with, rather than bringing it to the attention of the guards.

The extortion of POWs by one another has been a neglected aspect of the POW experience, because it is confronting to acknowledge that these men exploited one another. It is particularly disturbing that these tales of sorrow and coercion have been ignored in New Zealand’s POW narrative because instances of POWs enduring duress were readily available. There were many cases of men being taken advantage of in both diaries and memoirs. Leaving these perspectives out of the nation’s wartime narrative ignores the realities suffered by those men. The

⁸⁹ *The Tiki Times: A Souvenir Booklet of the Camp Newspaper for Prisoners-of-War* (Palmerston North: Keeling & Mundy Ltd, 1950), p. 35.

⁹⁰ *Tiki Times*, p. 83.

⁹¹ *Tiki Times*, p. 83.

⁹² *Tiki Times*, p. 153.

accounts also stated that national comradeship gave little protection from corruption, with Lance Corporal Arch Scott remembering that New Zealanders abused each other by selling rotten bread for personal keepsakes.⁹³ Thomson was disparaging in his conclusions on selfishness and the establishment of economic hierarchies. Thomson remembered that

early in the piece was driven home, very forcibly, the obvious fact that all men were not created equal. Here we were ruthlessly reduced to the same level; yet we didn't stay like that. There were still the haves and the have-nots. There were those willing to work for the general welfare, and those willing to let them; and a few vicious specimens who were willing to prevent them.⁹⁴

Thomson contrasted the idealistic notion that men were created equal with his own unequal experience, noting, instead, that captivity resembled a Darwinian society where the strongest survived and the weak were marginalised. It was significant that Thomson revealed that some POWs were willing to sacrifice the community's well-being, in favour of their individual needs. This disturbing revelation suggested that these individuals recognised that they could improve their own situation by manufacturing disharmony and inequality.

In the environment of scarcity, suspicion of men getting more than their fair share was a constant distraction for POWs. Men turned on one another when there was a rumour that someone was benefiting over the group. Thomson recalled

the worst aspect of all was the unending suspicion. No one could do anything for the public good without being violently accused of making something concrete out of it for himself. Sometimes, of course, the accusation would be correct. But the most common effect of this continual suspicion was that the honest man might

⁹³ Arch Scott, *Dark of the Moon: The Unusual Story of one Kiwi's War* (Auckland: Cresset Books, 1985), p. 53.

⁹⁴ Thomson, p. 24.

eventually crack and actually do what he was being blamed for anyway.⁹⁵

Personal reputation played a large role in the identities that POWs labelled each other with. MacDuff noted an incident of stealing, and that when it was discovered who committed the crime, ‘the greedy, petty meanness of his misdemeanour, established a reputation which has followed him ever since and which has caused him to be ostracised by everyone where ever he appears he is known for his contemptible conduct.’⁹⁶ MacDuff’s account showed how POWs tried to deter bad behaviour. He alluded to an unspoken set of rules that POWs were expected to abide by, but the above examples of stealing revealed that some POWs simply ignored these guidelines and acted in their self-interests. MacDuff’s noted how POWs denounced inmates who were known as thieves and that it was not necessary to witness the crime; the stigma of alleged misconduct was sufficient to give a POW a poor reputation. Whether or not publically shaming POWs deterred poor behaviour was unclear, but it was revealing that POWs took steps to police themselves by marginalising those who refused to follow the rules of the majority.

Disagreements over the supply of food caused division among the men, especially between officers and regulars. Elworthy noted the situation at Galatas camp in Greece:

The overwhelming topic of conversation was the rackets that went on with food. At first I thought it was just the usual suspicion about senior ranks, but before long I saw there really was something to complain about – the whole camp was a network of intrigue and cheating.⁹⁷

Adding to the regular POWs’ suspicion of the officers’ better food supplies was the separate mess halls. Elworthy described how the officers were seen to be

⁹⁵ Thomson, p. 24.

⁹⁶ MacDuff, Book 14, p. 20.

⁹⁷ Elworthy, p. 146.

eating better than the other men. Some members of the camp confronted the officers about the imbalance in the food, but:

The officers responded to complaints by saying they bought the extra food themselves with their own money and with the permission of the Germans. That may have been true, but it seemed shameful that they were prepared to use their money to live very well in a camp where men were sick and dying of malnutrition.⁹⁸

Elworthy raised a common POW perception that someone else was getting more than their fair share. Even though prisoners of all ranks were known to act selfishly, when officers acted in their self-interests, it reinforced a resentment toward authority. In this case, the officers were not acting illegally, but Elworthy argued they were breaking their ethical responsibility to the rest of the POW community. He suggested that those in positions of authority had an obligation to work for the greater good of the community, even if it was to the detriment of themselves.

The expectation that POWs would sacrifice their well-being for the good of the community was reflected in the men's views toward the camp padres. Some POWs held these religious men in high regard, looking to them for physical and mental sustenance. However, the padres' social standing came with strict obligations, and if they failed to live up to their responsibilities, they were severely critiqued. Captain Bruce Robertson recalled that:

Some of the padres and the medicals and a chosen few were comfortably off and had three meals each day.... They were not keen about putting in a word for us as it would cramp their own style and would probably have affected their ration issue. It was there that I confirmed that the padres were just a mercenary as any

⁹⁸ Elworthy, p. 146.

other man; they were always to the fore and looked essentially after No.1.⁹⁹

Robertson argued that the padres had the ability to help the POWs, but did not because speaking out against the men's deprivation would have affected their own ration issue. Rather than religious men following and spreading the teachings of Christ, captivity had reduced the padres to selfish individuals. Robertson resented that the padres lived a comfortable life in the camps, while many other POWs suffered. He suggested that the padres had failed in their moral responsibility to protect the most vulnerable.

The jobs that POWs were assigned in permanent camps also played a role in determining economic hierarchies. Hyde suggested that the cooks had greater opportunities to be selfish, and he noted that:

It seemed quite often that this little group of the barrack leader, the soup king and the brew king would set themselves up a corner of the barrack with three bunks in it and build walls made of packing case plywood to make in effect a little room for, shall we say, 'the ruling elite' of the barrack.¹⁰⁰

These jobs were necessary to run the POW camps, but as Hyde argued, they led to economic and social divisions. Hierarchies transitioned from a simple model based on rank, to a more complex organisation where your job, skills, and who you knew mattered. The deprivation of the POWs inevitably led those who had control over food and supplies to wield power over others. In Hyde's case, the barrack leader and the cooks separated themselves from the rest of the hut, creating a room where they could act without the other POWs watching.

In conclusion, working for the enemy complicated the POW experience. Men were confronted with the realisation that any work they undertook would help the

⁹⁹ Bruce Robertson, *For the Duration: 2NZEF Officer Bruce Robertson on Active Duty and 'In the Bag'*, ed. by Rosanne Robertson (Wellington: Ngaio Press, 2010), pp. 91-92.

¹⁰⁰ Hyde, p. 53.

Axis war effort. This added another layer of complexity to the construction of identity in captivity. Forced labour robbed POWs of what little agency they enjoyed in permanent camps. Although work assignments could break up the monotony of camp life, they were often menial tasks that proved humiliating to the men's masculine identities. At times, allocations to work assignments became extremely competitive, especially when officers decided to waive their right to not work. The concept of officers applying for work proved disruptive to camp unity, with many POWs criticising their willingness to help the enemy.

The inadequacy of German and Italian camp rations meant that POWs became reliant on Red Cross parcels for food. In addition to extra supplies, these parcels allowed POWs to trade goods with one another. The parcels contained cigarettes which became the medium of exchange because they were relatively homogenous and durable. The prevalence of economic activity impacted the prison space by shaping it into a competitive environment. Men were willing and able to exploit one another to benefit themselves and their close associates. Even when corrupt practices were not present, the unnerving suspicion that something untoward might happen negatively affected the POWs' mental state.

The development of camp economies structured on cigarettes and Red Cross parcels created a competitive atmosphere which has seldom been examined in wartime histories. In many cases, this internal competition for supplies provided more deprivation for New Zealand POWs. Trading eventually led to some POWs being better off than others, so the utopian ideal of POWs banding together was thoroughly exposed. Men were selfish, looking after themselves and their close friends. The prominence of economic inequality and coercion in New Zealand POW accounts highlights a disturbing development in the construction of the country's wartime narrative. The duress that these men experienced has been neglected in favour of a more romantic and adventurous portrayal of the POW experience. This chapter has added a comprehensive examination of the economic complexities that New Zealand POWs experienced during captivity, with particular emphasis on the impact that deprivation had on their emotions.

Chapter Five - A Long Way from Home

Mail from Glasgow and from Crew
Wellington and Timaru;
Mail from Melbourne and from Perth
From all corners of the earth
Mail comes from home.

Bringing cheer to the lonely heart
Bringing hope of another start
Lighting the eye, waking the smile,
Making life again worth while,
Mail comes from home.¹

Even though some prisoners found that leisure activities transformed a previously foreign environment into a more comfortable space, POW camps were still isolated places. New Zealanders were particularly affected because of the vast distance between the camps in Europe and their homeland. Without a stable connection to their support networks back home, New Zealanders increasingly suffered from mental fatigue and depression as the war dragged on. As Padre John Ledgerwood's poem suggested, correspondence was possible, and it brought relief for many POWs. However, Ledgerwood neglected to mention that the wait for news from home was agonising, and even when it was received, it was bittersweet because it often reminded the men of what they were missing out on.

While the thesis has highlighted the men's varied resistance attempts, these actions were not always successful in staving off depression and trauma. And although this chapter examines some of the ways the men maintained their mental health, it is more focused on representing the men's mental deterioration as they

¹ John Ledgerwood, *Stalag XVIII A Wolfsburg*, MS-Papers-5644-3, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

endured a prolonged captivity. It emphasises how the isolated prison space compounded the men's mental anguish. Without a reliable source of information, prisoners agonised over the uncertain progress of the war. While letters from home lessened some men's loneliness, the inability to freely interact with family and friends resulted in POWs feeling like they were missing out on important life events. The chapter draws on a wide selection of letters and postcards to highlight the information that the men were sending home about their emotional lives. Moreover, the chapter examines how the claustrophobic conditions of the camp space provided an environment where heightened emotions damaged the POW community. The arguments put forward in this chapter show how prisoners viewed mental illness in captivity and their efforts to maintain their mental well-being.

Many academic studies of POW mental health have questioned how imprisonment affected a person's life post-captivity. While this approach is beyond the scope of this thesis, these examinations are useful in indicating the likely causes of mental fatigue in captivity. In a study of civilian internees of the Japanese in World War II, sociologist Marilyn Potts contended that:

Uncertainty characterized daily life. Harassments such as unscheduled roll calls, day or night, were routine. Camp guards held the power of life or death and demanded absolute obedience. Restriction of daily food allotments was a common punishment for real or imaginary infractions.²

Potts argued that life in captivity was extremely unpredictable because the guards held absolute power over the prisoners. The volatile relationship between guards and captives increased the mental fatigue of POWs. Likewise, historian Rosalind Header noted that the Japanese guards often impeded the efforts of Australian

² Marilyn K. Potts, 'Long-Term Effects of Trauma: Post-Traumatic Stress Among Civilian Internees of the Japanese during World War II', *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 50, 5 (September, 1994), p. 682.

POW doctors.³ The continual abuse of authority reinforced the inferiority of the prisoners, which led to some POWs feeling worthless.

Similarly, psychologists Yuval Neria, Zahava Solomon and Rachel Dekel examined the mental pressures faced by Israeli POWs during the Yom Kippur War. They argued that:

Physical and psychological torture, systematic humiliation and isolation, loss of personal freedom and being subjected to total control, are only part of the intense traumatization. Falling captive may rapidly lead victims to lose their identity as active combat soldiers, to experience a sense of defeat and betrayal, along with painful guilt and shame.⁴

Neria, Solomon and Dekel noted how external pressures from captors were only one part of the captive experience. In the quieter moments of captivity, prisoners had to comprehend how and why they were in this foreign situation. These reflections often led to a confronting realisation that they had failed in their duty. The internal guilt that some prisoners placed on themselves became a source of shame that was, in some cases, more damaging than the demeaning actions of their captors.

Rather than the inconsistent actions of the guards, New Zealand POWs struggled with the monotony and the unknown length of their captivity. Corporal John Quinlan noted in his diary in 1942 that there were times when the slow progress of the war made the camp space unbearable:

Woke this morning in a bad temper, you get these periods of absolute desolation when the war appears to be going on forever &

³ Rosalind Hearder, 'More Complex than a Stereotype: Australian POW Doctors and the Japanese in Captivity', *Health and History*, 6, 2 (2004), pp. 80.

⁴ Yuval Neria, Zahava Solomon and Rachel Dekel, 'Adjustment to War Captivity: The Role of Sociodemographic Background, Trauma Severity, and Immediate Responses, in the Long-Term Mental Health of Israeli Ex-POWs', *Anxiety, Stress, & Coping*, 13, 3 (2008), pp. 229-30.

anyway what is there special about it ending any time. Life gets a burden & the wire looks 60 ft high.⁵

Quinlan suggested that the constant uncertainty of the POWs' situation exaggerated feelings of entrapment. In these moments of depression, men felt suffocated by the camp's confines. Walls and barbed wire became even more ominous and restricting. However, rather than expressing a need to escape this space, Quinlan was overwhelmed about his captivity, to the point where he was detached from his eventual liberation. Quinlan's acceptance of whatever his fate would be highlighted how the camp space made POWs feel physically and mentally trapped.

Similar to Quinlan, Lance Corporal Tony Vercoe recalled that the physical confines of the camp had a detrimental effect on their mental health. Vercoe noted:

Life in these camps was changing us in other ways as well. Between the constant outer boundaries - the high, double barbed-wire fences, searchlight towers, machine gun posts and trigger-happy guards – and the inner constraints – the long queues for food, the roll calls, the unending battle with lice and the boredom – we were limited physically and in danger of being mentally hamstrung.⁶

This statement showed how the camp space was affected by dual restrictions, the outer camp boundaries and the daily routines of camp life. Recognising that the POWs were unable to leave the camps, Vercoe noted how the monotony of camp life slowly broke down the POWs' mental resolve. Whether it was queuing for food or being physically counted, the repetition of these uniform actions dehumanised the POWs. Vercoe's realisation that mental fatigue was a real danger that they encountered in the camp space was striking. It showed an

⁵ John Quinlan, Diary, MSX-2732-2734, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, 10-9-1942.

⁶ Tony Vercoe, *Yesterdays Drums: Echoes from the Wasteland of War* (Wellington: Steele Roberts Ltd, 2001), pp. 111-12.

awareness in the moment, and in later reflections, that the POWs understood how the oppressing camp confines affected their health. Warrant Officer Galbraith Hyde noted that at Lamsdorf he quickly came to ‘the realisation that the enemy was within and the real fight was to stop the environment affecting you to the extent of going gaga.’⁷

These accounts suggested that the physical structures containing the men not only isolated them from their pre-war support networks, but also contributed to a depressing atmosphere in camp life. As Quinlan and Hyde stated, POWs dreaded how the space was affecting their mental health. These admissions provided evidence toward this thesis’ arguments on how spatial factors affected the POW experience. During periods of extended stationary containment, POWs were more likely to suffer from a decline in mental health. However, this thesis has contended that POWs were able to distract themselves from their oppressing and remote camp space with leisure activities and mandatory work requirements. These acts of physical and mental mobility highlighted that although the POWs were confined, they still experienced aspects of agency. Nevertheless, these activities were hindered by the revelations that Vercoe made regarding the inner constraints of the camp space. Monotony, lack of supplies and poor hygiene compounded already remote camps into oppressive spaces where many POWs found it nearly impossible to maintain their mental health.

While examining the POWs’ accounts, it became clear that a large part of their identities was garnered from a connection to the war’s progress. Sociologist Walter Lunden argued that POWs were negatively affected by their obsession of how and when the war would end. Lunden contended that:

The endless hoping and waiting creates a restless expectation, uncertainty and a demoralizing melancholia which is often hard to combat. Some men refuse to talk or take part in camp affairs.

⁷ Galbraith Hyde, *The Personal Account of One Man’s War 1939-1945*, MS-Papers-5290, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 45.

Others busy themselves with various types of manual work in order to break the monotony and the tension.⁸

Lunden explained that the disempowerment of the POWs' situation created an environment where men had no control over when their captivity would end. Some POWs accepted their predicament and put their liberation to the back of their minds, busying themselves with hobbies and other distractions. However, some men lived in constant anticipation of good news, latching on to any rumours of possible Allied advances.

Rumours of the war's progress were a daily occurrence in camp life, with many POWs continually beaten down by the lack of credible news from the front lines. However, even in their restricted and isolated space, the men received surprisingly accurate reports of the war which, when things were going well, provided a much-needed boost to morale. News was obtained by various means, but the two most prominent communication networks were new prisoners and hand-made camp radios. Warrant Officer Jack Elworthy noted how his camp at Wolfsburg stayed informed on the war:

A radio set had been hidden under one of the administration tents. It was used to get the BBC News, which was read to us by the padre after his evening church service. The padre was a typical English curate, a really nice man, quite young and with a cultured English accent. He could not complain about the size of his congregation: a surprisingly large number of men had become religious.⁹

Elworthy suggested that some POWs sought solace in news reports from outside the wire. Connecting to the war allowed some men to mentally escape the confines of the camp, albeit briefly. The comparison of these broadcasts and religion was telling because the POWs had to trust, or at least hope, that these

⁸ Walter A. Lunden, 'Captivity Psychoses among Prisoners of War', *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 39, 6 (1949), p. 730.

⁹ Jack Elworthy, *Greece, Crete, Stalag, Dachau: A New Zealand Soldier's Encounters with Hitler's Army* (Wellington: Awa Press, 2014), p. 152.

statements were true. Confined within their camps, the POWs were not able to verify the accuracy of these accounts, believing the reports from the BBC required faith.

Unsurprisingly, POWs were eager to learn about Allied advances, and this news had a significant effect on their mental health. Whether the men were eager to hear about developments on the frontlines because it reconnected them with their soldierly identities or because it served a more practical purpose of foretelling their eventual release was debatable. However, it was clear that war news was both beneficial and harmful in the camp space. Sergeant Pilot Jack Hardie noted at Lamsdorf that news from the front ‘greatly boosted our morale and twice every day from then on we heard from London.’¹⁰ When the war’s progress appeared to be overwhelmingly positive, men allowed themselves to hope for a quick release. Private Alf Rawlings noted in his diary in 1945 that ‘it’s so hard to believe that shortly we may be free. I can reason it out, but cannot feel that soon barbed wire and guards will be things of the past.’¹¹ However, Rawlings’ optimism was short-lived, when a few days later he wrote:

I sound so jubilant in what I wrote a week ago, but now I’m feeling browned off. Not an item of news in the last week, and we haven’t been able to get a German newspaper. It seems the Russians have been halted. It’s always the same in this life, some good news and then a complete lapse of news, which makes us all heartily fed up.¹²

These instances of a possible breakthrough highlighted the ebb and flow that war news had on the men’s emotions. In one moment POWs were jubilant about the possibilities, but in almost all cases this hope was unfounded.

¹⁰ Jack Hardie, *From Timaru to Stalag VIII B: A Kiwi Airman’s Wartime Story* (Wellington: Steele Roberts Ltd, 2009), p. 93.

¹¹ Alf Rawlings, *Diary of Life in a Stalag* (Timaru: Alf Rawlings, 1991), p. 46.

¹² Rawlings, p. 47.

Even though news was limited, men remained interested in staying connected to the events beyond the wire. Ledgerwood explained that:

We were prisoners of war in complete isolation from our own people. We were undernourished and consequently sensitive to the least whisperings of better things to come.... We clutched at anything which we imagined would calm our stifled fears, or ease the humiliation of our position. We became rumour addicts.¹³

His explanation of the strength of rumours in camp life emphasised how isolated the prison space was to familiar support networks. In the depressing confines of captivity, POWs were willing to cling to any news of their prior lives. Rawlings stated that, 'A rumour was never laughed at; it gave us a hope we could find in no other avenue.' Importantly, the POWs' accounts expressed a desire to return home, not to the war itself. Rawlings noted in 1943 that, 'The Russian news is good and so is the bombing of Germany. One can't help feeling that "it won't be long now"'.¹⁴ Similarly, Private Dudley Muff wrote in his diary to his niece that, 'Joe is putting in a big push that looks as if it might succeed in pushing me right home to you'.¹⁵

Most POWs were obsessed with developments in the European theatre, with little mention of the advances of the Japanese in the Pacific. While news from the Pacific did not dominate daily conversations, bad news from that theatre of war was very disconcerting to the POWs. New Zealand's proximity to the conflict worried some of the POWs, especially since they were not there to protect their families. Captain J.D. Gerard remembered that after Singapore fell:

We knew that our homes were threatened, but there we were thousands of miles away, penned in behind barbed wire and powerless to do anything. It was the bitterest period of our

¹³ Ledgerwood, p. 5.

¹⁴ Rawlings, p. 147.

¹⁵ Dudley Muff, *Alison's Book*, 2005.420, The Kippenberger Military Archive, Waiouru, New Zealand, p. 54.

captivity and the one occasion when we found it hard to resurrect our optimism.¹⁶

Likewise, Private John Williamson wrote home in 1942, noting that, 'I hope to see you all by this time next year so make sure you hold off those yellow devils so we can have a smack at them.'¹⁷ These examples emphasised how captivity had removed the men from their traditional role as protectors of their families and, as soldiers, the nation. Still, the men were relatively optimistic that New Zealand would remain safe throughout the war. It was upon seeing Russian civilians that the fortune of those back home was unmistakable. Corporal Fred Stuckey remembered that at Spittal XVIIIIB, Austria:

Pondering their sad plight, I decided our separation from our loved ones was not as bad as theirs, especially we New Zealanders. Our homes were safe unless an incredible disaster occurred. Those Russians, however, more than likely had been torn away from homes burnt to the ground and many of their loved ones left dead.¹⁸

Stuckey was disturbed by the hardships that the Russians had to endure, especially the destruction of their homes. His personal suffering was lessened when he recognised that eventually he would be able to leave this war-torn environment and return home. In this context, New Zealand was positioned as an idyllic land that was untouched by the conflict.

Although the concept of POWs longing for home is not surprising, it highlighted a detachment from their soldierly identities. Many POW accounts and histories have tended to emphasise narratives of remaining connected to their former role as soldiers by highlighting escapes and acts of sabotage. However, while reading the POWs' diaries and letters, it was striking how infrequently they mentioned

¹⁶ J.D. Gerard, *Unwilling Guests* (Wellington: Reed, 1945), p. 77.

¹⁷ John Williamson, Letter collection, MS-Papers-8347-01, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, 10 January 1942.

¹⁸ Fred Stuckey, *Sometimes Free: My Escapes from German P.O.W. Camps* (Ashhurst: J. Stuckey, 1977), p. 74.

their direct connection to the war. Whether it was because of the confronting transition to captivity, or the close interactions with enemy soldiers, New Zealand POW accounts expressed a distinct dispassion for the war. While envisaging their release, POWs were not interested in returning to active duty. Their thoughts were strongly centred on when the war would end so that they could go home. In the privacy of their diaries or later in life in their memoirs, New Zealand POWs reflected on the senselessness of the conflict. Captain Roger Kearney noted that his camp observed Armistice Day with a joint moment of silence, and that:

It is in moments like these that we think and realise what a hell of a thing war really is when stripped of all its trappings, and what a senseless thing it is when stripped of all the propaganda that keeps it going.¹⁹

Interactions with camp guards proved detrimental to camp morale, with many POWs realising that their captors were as powerless to end the war as they were. As the war worsened for the Axis, an air of despondency filled the prison space, with Captain John Borrie noting that the ‘Germans were on edge: their unrest affected us all.’²⁰ In another example, Staff Sergeant John Hobbs wrote in his diary that, ‘On more than one occasion when warned of the impending return to action, a guard has committed suicide here.’²¹

In certain instances, POWs were confronted by the destruction that the Allied bombing efforts had on Germany. Private Arthur Coe was briefly taken to Berlin where he ‘gazed in awe at the evidence of the crazy destruction of war.’²² Similarly, Rawlings was taken to a hospital in Leipzig, and had to travel through the war-torn city. He remembered that he ‘felt somewhat ashamed on the tram journey through Leipzig, with great heaps of wrecked houses and buildings on all

¹⁹ Rodger Kearney, Typescript Diary, MS-Papers-8826, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 43.

²⁰ John Borrie, *Despite Captivity: A Doctor's Life as Prisoner of War* (New Zealand: Whitcoulls Limited, 1975), p. 210.

²¹ John Hobbs, Diary, MS-Papers-3958-2, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 97.

²² Arthur Coe, Unpublished Manuscript, 2005.291, The Kippenberger Military Archive, Waiouru, New Zealand, p. 38.

sides.... I didn't feel elated at what I saw.'²³ Rawlings' account reflected an inconsistency in the men's perspective of the war. On one hand, in order to be liberated, the POWs needed the Allies to be victorious, but this meant the destruction of other people's lives. Within the camps, the men were distanced from the bloody details of war. They followed Allied advances without actually seeing the costs of their liberation. However, when some POWs, like Rawlings, were moved through areas that had been affected by conflict, they were disturbed by the horrors of war. The POWs' complex relationship with war filtered into some of their diaries and memoirs. It was significant that Rawlings expressed shame over what had happened to Leipzig, it was a powerful, reflective response which showed how complicated it was for him to construct his wartime experience.

Coming to terms with what was happening both within captivity and beyond the wire was difficult for many POWs. Similar to Rawlings, Muff understood the horrors of war, but in his writings he tried to protect his niece. Muff noted that:

On Nov. 15th the first snow came floating prettily down. Now in the land the gentle tinkle of sleigh bells will be heard, overhead the roar of the war birds and their eggs will stain the whiteness with red; and somewhere the bell will peal forth the glad tidings of a great victory; and I am glad Alison you are not old enough to understand all this.²⁴

Although Muff's statement shielded his niece from the horrific details of the war, the sorrow he felt toward the war was apparent. These colourful references concealed the vivid terror of war from his niece. His metaphor of the planes as birds and the bombs as eggs was striking, leading to the white, peaceful landscape being stained red by the conflict. While horrific, however, he also suggested that these violent actions were necessary for the 'great victory' that would also lead to his liberation.

²³ Rawlings, p. 33.

²⁴ Muff, p. 20.

As the war in Europe progressed into its final stages, POW camps became directly impacted by nearby battles. Borrie remembered that, 'The war that had vanished in Corinth four years before had suddenly returned to our very doorstep. By the sullen booming of guns and intense air activity, we knew we were close to the front line.'²⁵ Accounts of witnessing conflict shed new light on the dangers that POWs faced while in captivity. And although the men's proximity to conflict areas indicated that their release was approaching, these close encounters were traumatic to the men because they remained powerless to intervene. Moreover, it was revealing that in the moments mentioned above, none of the men proclaimed their willingness to re-enter the war. Many of the New Zealanders that this thesis studies were enthusiastic about entering the conflict, but at some point during their imprisonment some men had a fundamental change in perspective about the war. During their captivity, many POWs voiced their distaste for war, and their anger toward the Germans for its continuation. Captain Bruce Robertson was particularly aggressive toward the Germans, stating, 'I hope they hang on for a while, so that they will be completely annihilated.'²⁶ Robertson's candid response to the prospect of more devastation was likely a result of his prolonged captivity. He noted in 1944:

Fifth anniversary of the declaration of war. Who would have thought in 1939 that I was to waste five years of my life in such a fruitless fashion? Here I sit awaiting the end of it and wondering how long it will be before hostilities cease and after that how long it will be before I'm home again.²⁷

In later diary entries, Robertson's anger appeared to have subsided. By the time he heard of the Dresden bombings he noted that the war had become a 'Useless slaughter. I can't see these people being allowed to stop fighting.'²⁸

²⁵ Borrie, p. 210.

²⁶ Bruce Robertson, *For the Duration: 2NZEF Officer Bruce Robertson on Active Duty and 'In the Bag'*, ed. by Rosanne Robertson (Wellington: Ngaio Press, 2010), p. 217.

²⁷ Robertson, p. 221.

²⁸ Robertson, p. 262.

Communication with loved ones was important to POWs, but the isolated camp space made contact with pre-war support networks difficult. New Zealand postal historians Barry Scott and Robin Startup examined the structure of mail service to POW camps during World War Two. Scott and Startup contended that the nature of war inevitably resulted in men becoming ‘trapped on the “other side” with no way to communicate with their homeland.’²⁹ However, over time the rules established in the Geneva Convention allowed correspondence to be undertaken.³⁰ The sheer volume of mail to and from the camps required a systematic message system. The large majority of mail correspondence that this study has examined were standard camp postcards. Scott and Startup noted very few of these sources survived because of the ‘difficult day-to-day living conditions in the enemy POW camps meant that every single item that came into the camp had to be used to the utmost.’³¹

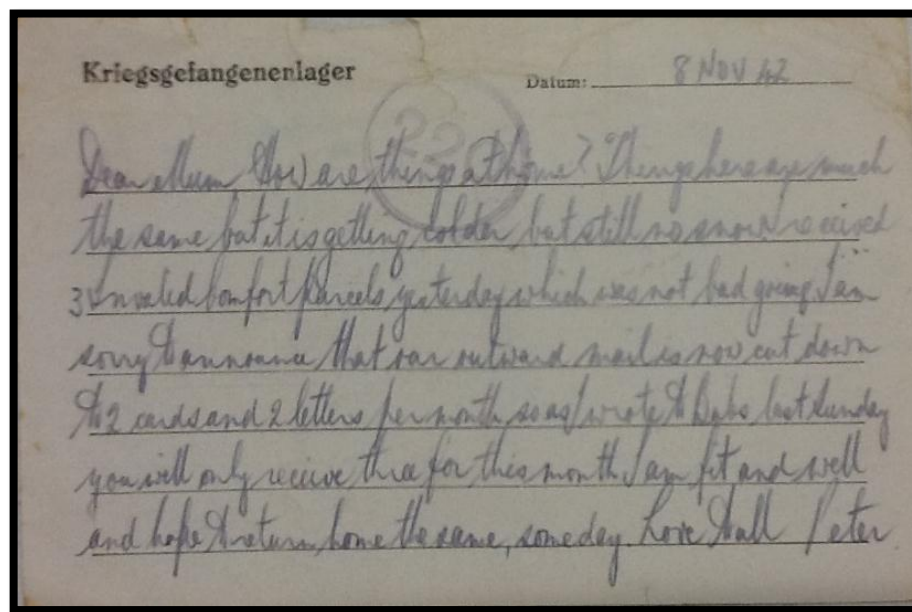


Figure 5.1. Postcard from Sergeant Peter Howden to his mother.³²

²⁹ Barry J E Scott FRPSL and Robin M Startup RDP, FRPSL, FRPSNZ, *Treasured Letters: New Zealand Prisoner of War Air Letter Cards 1941-1945*, ed. by Brian G. Vincent (Wellington: Royal Philatelic Society of New Zealand Incorporated, 2011), p. 1.

³⁰ Scott and Startup, p. 1.

³¹ Scott and Startup, p. 4.

³² Peter Howden, Postcards, MS-Papers-7865-3, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, 8 November 1942.

Figure 5.1. highlights that the postcards limited the extent of communication with their loved ones, with little space to express their emotions. Hardie remembered that at Lamsdorf:

We were allowed to send one postcard and one small letter card each month. These were censored by the Germans and again on entering NZ, so there wasn't much of interest we could say and expect it to get through. Some of our incoming mail was so heavily blotted out it was hard to know what the letter was about.³³

Hardie noted that POWs were aware that their mail would be read, so they self-censored their correspondence. He suggested that it was better to write about simple, non-contentious facets of camp life, thereby increasing the chances of the message arriving home. Hardie stated that the mail from New Zealand was often censored by the authorities. Although these messages connected POWs to their loved ones, the blotted out letters reinforced the men's inability to converse freely.

Establishing contact with loved ones back home was central to the men's mental health. Ledgerwood noted the importance of mail when he was imprisoned in Stalag XVIII A:

Above everything else we wanted to send and receive mail. Perhaps the most difficult period we went through was that during which we were completely cut off from family contacts: when we were uncertain what news our people had of our whereabouts and our conditions.³⁴

Furthermore, Ledgerwood stated that 'until the dominant desire for news from home had been satisfied, no one was very happy.'³⁵ Major Archie MacDuff also expressed the need to inform his family of his situation. In 1941 he wrote in his diary that:

³³ Hardie, p. 88.

³⁴ Ledgerwood, p. 2.

³⁵ Ledgerwood, p. 3.

I am extremely anxious to get news to Olive to let her know how things are with me. It worries me sick. The only way to go on is to make one's mind a blank and think about nothing. Introspection and retrospections can only lead to neurasthenic morbidity.³⁶

MacDuff suggested that he was anxious about his loved ones not knowing where he was and what had happened to him. He struggled with the uncertainty of his situation, and the sense that he may be forgotten back home. Rather than thinking about home, MacDuff found it easier to try and forget the outside world, if his mind was blank he was protected from dark thoughts. However, feelings of isolation were amplified by the time delay between sending and receiving messages. Months went by without any word from home. POWs, like MacDuff, had little choice but to worry about their next mail delivery, and if it would come at all.

Through their transition from soldier to captive, the men's identities had shifted dramatically, but the desire to contact their loved ones highlighted the need to reconnect with their pre-war lives. Moreover, correspondence with familiar support networks anchored the men's emotions during their confronting ordeal. In an article on the experiences of British POWs, historian Clare Makepeace argued that correspondence with loved ones allowed POWs to 'achieve a sense of continuity between their past and future existences.'³⁷ This concept of continuity, and its impact on identity construction, was similar to the experiences of New Zealand POWs, because when the men felt threatened by their isolated predicament, they sought refuge in their pre-war lives. Private Ernest Clarke noted in his memoir that:

It was in the hush of night that thoughts would dwell on pensive reflections of home and family and whimsical musing over happenings long ago – memories had become precious. In the

³⁶ Archie Peter MacDuff, Diary, 1999.1089, The Kippenberger Military Archive, Waiouru, New Zealand, 3 May 1941.

³⁷ Clare Makepeace, 'Living Beyond the Barbed Wire: The Familial Ties of British Prisoners of War held in Europe during the Second World War', *Historical Research*, 86, 231 (2013), p. 160.

realms of his own mind the expatriot could traverse time and space
in meditation on his own homeland.³⁸

Clarke's statement showed how POWs escaped their physical desolation, and found salvation in dreams of home. Memories were savoured as portals to a happier time, free from war and captivity. Clarke employed gentle language that emphasised his longing for home. He was nostalgic as he reflected, meditated, and mused about a life without war. These peaceful reflections of home contrasted the depressing and war-ravaged spaces that the POWs encountered on a daily basis.

Historian David Gerber focused on the relationship between continuity and identity in his study on immigrant letter writing. Similar to the transition made by POWs, Gerber contended that, 'Immigration has always put migrants at risk of a radical rupture of the self.'³⁹ He argued that continuity was central to identity construction because 'Personal identity depends on the assurance that we are indeed the same person, we have always been, and it is served most profoundly through abiding relationships with significant others.'⁴⁰ Moreover, Gerber came to the conclusion that even when dealing with distressing situations, people tended to correspond with positive affirmations. In many cases, he noted that the temptation was great 'to engage in the often parodied "I am well and doing well" formulation'.⁴¹ This positive structure was apparent in much of the correspondence that this study examined. Many New Zealand POWs neglected to mention the harsh reality of their situation to their loved ones, perhaps in an attempt to lessen concerns back home. While imprisoned in Italy, Captain John Steel wrote home in 1943 with a simple message that, 'I am still well and keeping so, but have gone a lot greyer than when in N.Z. Give my thanks to all who gave you things for the parcel.'⁴² Steel's reference to him aging was a poignant reminder of the length that some men spent in captivity. POWs struggled with the

³⁸ Ernest Clarke, *Over the Fence is Out* (Papakura: E. Clarke, 1987), p. 38.

³⁹ David Gerber, 'Acts of Deceiving and Withholding in Immigrant Letters: Personal Identity and Self-Presentation in Personal Correspondence', *Journal of Social History*, 39, 2, (2005), p. 318.

⁴⁰ Gerber, p. 318.

⁴¹ Gerber, p. 321.

⁴² John Steel, Letter Collection, MS-Papers-7387, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, 27 January 1943.

uncertainty of when they would return home, but parcels from home helped to assure them that they were not forgotten. Likewise, Sergeant John McKay wrote home from Stalag XIII in 1943 to assure his family that he was okay. McKay stated, ‘Tell mother ... not to worry and I am quite alright. Hope things are still ok with you all.’⁴³

Similarly, Clarke expressed the need to remain optimistic in order to combat the mental fatigue of captivity. He remembered

the insidious torments of Campo 65 had weird effects on the mind, floating at times in the sort of delirium that accompanys [*sic*] anaesthetization.... Such morbidity gripped POWs as indeed it must hold any in similar circumstances. Notwithstanding, despondency has to be shaken off, forgotten, dismissed as a fit of the blues. It will all turn out right in the end – sometime imprisonment will be of the past, even something to laugh about.⁴⁴

Clarke revealed that when captivity started to become too much, POWs reminded themselves that their situation was temporary, and that things would one day be okay. While camp life could be disturbing, Clarke suggested that some aspects would be the source of humour in the future. His upbeat perspective helped to fend off feelings of hopelessness and fear. Likewise, Private Jack Gallichan noted that, ‘through optimism we can have sunshine, while pessimism can never get us out of the shadows.’⁴⁵

Highlighting the hesitant optimism that structured many POWs’ correspondence neglects that some men wrote home to express their negative emotions about their isolation. However, the positivity that was expressed by some POWs showed a desire to calm the fears of their loved ones. Moreover, by maintaining an upbeat

⁴³ John McKay, Letter Collection, 1999.1732, The Kippenberger Military Archive, Waiouru, New Zealand, 22 December 1943.

⁴⁴ Clarke, p. 39.

⁴⁵ Jack Gallichan, *Barbed Wire Days*, MS-Papers-8910-01, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 28.

outlook, it encouraged people back home to continue writing to them. Comparably, Gerber noted that his study showed that

even in such tense and constrained circumstances, the parties continued for years to negotiate their correspondence, and to write, read, and exchange letters, leaving out only what was too painful or at least inconvenient to address truthfully or at all, and hoping they would be able to carry off their often well-intentioned masquerade for one more letter.⁴⁶

It was significant that much of the correspondence examined by this thesis featured the POWs' intention to further their dialogues. Messages were not singular, they were a part of a larger, continuous conversation. Postcards often referenced an earlier discussion, and the POWs always posed a question for the recipient, implying that they expected another letter in response.

In some cases, POWs received more mail than they were able to respond to. Still, when he was at Lamsdorf in 1943, Gunner Bruce Brier expressed his gratitude for these connections by writing to his sister, imploring her to, 'Tell Bid I have had two or three letters from her lately and wish her all the best, I can't however from my limited number of cards write to her at present.'⁴⁷ Brier's confirmation that he was receiving this extra correspondence may have been intended to encourage Bid to continue writing to him, and a way of showing that he was reading all the letters he received. Likewise, Steel wrote in a letter home:

Pass on my thanks to Auntie Doll for her letter, will write to her again when I have a spare card but she will appreciate that I do not have many – we will make up for all these things when I get home (what a day!)⁴⁸

The examples from Brier and Steel highlighted how POWs tried to maintain continuous conversations with multiple loved ones. POWs used one letter to

⁴⁶ Gerber, p. 327.

⁴⁷ Bruce Brier, Edited Letter Collection, 2005.438, The Kippenberger Military Archive, Waiouru, New Zealand, 30 May 1943.

⁴⁸ Steel, 27 January 1943.

communicate with a group of people, because limited postcards made it difficult to respond to every letter. This writing technique ensured that the POWs acknowledged all of their messages, and encouraged future responses.

Within the confines of the isolated camp space, news from home was immensely valuable to the men's well-being. This was confirmed in historian Johnathan Vance's study of Canadian POWs' letters home. Vance contended that, 'Mail from home was eagerly awaited, and some prisoners passed the time drafting complex charts or graphs to record the receipt of letters and parcels from friends and family.'⁴⁹ This obsession with mail deliveries was apparent in accounts of New Zealand POWs, with many keeping similar charts in their diaries. Figure 5.2. shows how POWs kept track of the parcels they received in captivity. Moreover, this chart, and others like it, highlighted how POWs noted their connections with people beyond the wire. These connections were based upon continual letter writing, and in some cases the POWs viewed the letter as a physical reminder of home. Letters provided most men with comfort, or at the very least acknowledged that they were not forgotten. The ability for letters to reduce the feeling of isolation was documented by Australian historian Robert Holden in his study on how Anzac troops in World War One distracted themselves from the horrors of war.⁵⁰ Holden contended that the 'letter itself was a physical artefact that could cultivate and preserve intimacy by making the absent correspondent almost seem physical.'⁵¹

⁴⁹ Jonathan F. Vance, *Objects of Concern: Canadian Prisoners of War through the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994), p. 145.

⁵⁰ Robert Holden, *And the Band Played On* (Melbourne: Hardie Grant Books, 2014)

⁵¹ Holden, p. 237.

1943.

23

Parcel	Despatched	Received	Sent By:-
1. 200 Cigarettes	April	Aug 16 TH	M.E. Allen
1. Clothing	May	July 29 TH	Mother
1. 200 Cigarettes	June	Sept 24 TH	D. Evans
1. 200 Cigarettes	May	Sept 24 TH	Pat
1. 200 Cigarettes	May	Sept 24 TH	John Allen
1. Clothing	May	July 7 TH	S.A. Africa
1. Books via Dulay	April	Aug 31 ST	M.E. Allen
1. 200 Cigarettes	May	Aug 31 ST	N.Z. House
1. 200 Cigarettes	June	Sept 6 TH	N.Z. House
1. 200 Cigarettes	May 12 TH	Sept 17 TH	M.E. Allen
1. Books	May	Oct 7 TH	M.E. Allen
1. Clothing	July	Oct 21 ST	Mother
1. 500 Cigarettes	July	Oct 4 TH	Mother
1. 200 Cigarettes	July	Oct 4 TH	N.Z. House
1. 200 Cigarettes	April 30 TH	Nov. 12 TH	M.E. Allen
1. 200 Cigarettes	June	Dec 12 TH	M.E. Allen
1. 200 Cigarettes	June	Dec 22 ND	N.Z. House

Total parcels received in 1943 = 17 Description:-

Cigarettes	12
Clothing	3
Books	2
TOTAL	17

Total Cigarettes received = 2,700.

Books sent through 'For-gott-me-not' League
Miss Christine Knowles OBE
Carnegie House
Hanford St. London W.1.

Figure 5.2. A parcel log.⁵²

While the receipt of mail raised the spirits of POWs, the lack of mail negatively impacted their emotions. This effect was evident when some POWs received letters and others did not. Robertson noted in 1944 that:

Lots of mail pouring in daily; some fellows collect 20 at a time.

Many of us are groaning with neglect. I hope there is a heap for me

⁵² Claude Grimsey, Diary, 1986/69/8, Waikato Museum.

somewhere. I go on to midday parade with anticipatory enthusiasm and daily come inside again with my tail well down.⁵³

In Robertson's experience, the uncertainty of mail deliveries was especially apparent during anniversaries. On his 35th birthday he noted that, 'I'm feeling lots of pain re lack of mail.'⁵⁴ Later, Robertson noted that when he received no new mail, he satisfied himself 'by reading over old letters, at least the important ones and I've destroyed the others.'⁵⁵ His conservation of some letters, while destroying others revealed that POWs were selective about what memories they preserved. Robertson noted that he kept important letters, but he does not elaborate on what made certain letters special. Nevertheless, when captivity made the world bleak, these letters were an essential coping mechanism.

Even when mail was more frequent, Robertson noted that news from home could be unsettling. He stated in 1944:

How we froth at the mouth when we read what everyone is doing. Surely this prison life is the world's biggest kick in the arse and when I say arse, I mean arse. I find this life most unsettling mentally, when I think of how much there is to be done and we just have to sit and wait and pretend to interest and amuse ourselves.⁵⁶

Robertson revealed that POWs felt isolated and frustrated when reading news from home. It was confronting to be reminded that life in New Zealand went on without them. While people back home went about their lives, he had to distract himself with meaningless interests. He expressed anger at being left out of these experiences, and questioned if there would be a place for him upon his return home. Robertson suggested that he struggled with the prospect of his return to civilian life; the work required to fit back into society after years of captivity seemed overwhelming.

⁵³ Robertson, p. 187.

⁵⁴ Robertson, p. 189.

⁵⁵ Robertson, p. 203.

⁵⁶ Robertson, p. 203.

Stuckey felt similar emotions when reading letters from home. He noted that 'receiving mail from home unsettles a bloke. I know it does me. But even so, it is the only joy I get.'⁵⁷ The feelings expressed by Robertson and Stuckey may have alluded to a fear of being forgotten by their loved ones. This disconnection from home was explored in Makepeace's article on British POWs. Makepeace argued that 'the efforts made by prisoners to remain part of their civilian worlds were driven by fears of being usurped or forgotten. As a prisoner, a man was deprived of his role as protector, defender and provider to his family.'⁵⁸ Makepeace raised the idea of the POWs being emasculated while in captivity, and that reconnecting with loved ones alleviated some of these concerns. The impact that captivity had on the men's perception of gender was addressed in previous chapters, and it is important to emphasise that when life became particularly confronting, the POWs looked to their pre-war lives for support. She also considered how POWs used anniversaries to comprehend the passage of time, arguing that 'the men made sense of their period of internment not in terms of the progress of the war, but in terms of their domestic arrangements: another way in which P.O.W.s remained closely connected to home.'⁵⁹ Makepeace furthered this argument, stating that, 'Pure fantasies allowed prisoners of war to escape the barbed wire in all but body. Daily, weekly and yearly events provided specific opportunities when families could come together as simultaneous sharers in the captives' experience.'⁶⁰

These ideas of mentally escaping the prison space through imagination or, as this thesis has previously argued, participating in leisure activities, stresses how men dealt with their isolation. Thinking of home, either through re-living past experiences or by reading news from home reinforced the POWs' pre-war identities. It helped to reconfigure their perceptions of themselves, and served as a reminder that there was hope for the future.

⁵⁷ Stuckey, p. 154.

⁵⁸ Makepeace, p. 176.

⁵⁹ Makepeace, p. 175.

⁶⁰ Makepeace, p. 176.

Although recalling memories from home provided comfort for some POWs, others found imagining life back in New Zealand upsetting. Sergeant Pilot Jack Rae recalled how he had difficulty forgetting that he was a prisoner, noting that:

Dreaming of my beautiful Piha surf beach back in NZ was easy but drifting immediately off to sleep just didn't work for me. I remained acutely aware that I was lying on a very hard uncomfortable bunk, in a depressing wooden hut surrounded outside by menacing barbed wire.⁶¹

While reminiscing about their pre-war lives was comforting, Rae revealed these mental activities were not powerful enough to make a person forget that they were imprisoned in an oppressive space. Rae was constantly aware of his menacing surroundings, and the camp's lack of home comforts. Remembering his past experiences did not provide relief, it only reinforced his desolation.

Small events in camp life provoked memories that reminded POWs of home. Robertson noted that at his camp in Weinsberg, Germany:

We have a regular issue of beer each day, if you could call it beer. Practically non-intoxicant, but it has however a faint suggestion of that glorious golden beverage I faintly remember consuming in the dim past. Maybe in the distant future I may again make its glorious acquaintance.⁶²

The supply of beer to some camps allowed POWs to enjoy a previously satisfying experience. Although the camp brew was inferior to those that Robertson remembered back home, he was struck by the nostalgia that this beverage generated. It was another reminder of the warmth that awaited them back in New Zealand. Similarly, near the end of 1942, Private Sydney Burns wrote to his family, wishing them a happy holiday. He stated, 'I hope you all have a happy

⁶¹ Jack Rae, *Kiwi Spitfire Ace: A Gripping World War II Story of Action, Captivity and Freedom* (London: Grub Street, 2001), p. 130.

⁶² Robertson, p. 167.

one. Have a couple of quick ones on me just for old times, I'll have mine soon, I hope.'⁶³

As Makepeace contended, anniversaries became key dates that POWs used to reconnect with their pre-war lives. Burns' willingness to contact his loved ones at Christmas, or other festive occasions, was a recurring theme throughout the men's correspondence. Private Harold Wilson wrote several letters to his family as Christmas approached in 1943. Wilson noted that it was, 'Just a month to Xmas wish I was with you for it. Perhaps next time.'⁶⁴ Later, he wrote that 'it was the first white Christmas I have seen. I wonder what you all did over the holidays.'⁶⁵ The attempts to reconnect with loved ones and share in jovial experiences emphasised the POWs' need to lessen the isolation that they felt in the camp space. Missing out on celebrations and festive events made some POWs yearn for home, with Private Bernard Haigh noting in his diary in 1941 that, 'I am thinking of the Christmas services and carols at home today, how I do miss them! I shall love to hear them again. I'll be ever thankful when I do.'⁶⁶ Compounding their sense of isolation was the uncertainty of the length of their captivity. Hyde remembered that:

Looking back on it, one sees it as a couple of years, not too bad.
But when we were looking at it from that end we had no idea of the
length of our sentence or what was likely to happen at the end of it.
This was I think the thing that gnawed most continuously at every
Kriegie particularly during time spent in the main camp.⁶⁷

Hyde revealed that he struggled with the thought of missing out on experiences, and this feeling of being left out was compounded by the unknown length of his captivity. He suggested that time went faster when POWs were out of their restricting camp space. Leaving the camp space, whether it was moving camp or

⁶³ Sydney Burns, Letter Collection, MS-Papers-7156-1, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, 6 December 1942.

⁶⁴ Harold Wilson, Letter Collection, MS-Papers-11544, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, 23 November 1943.

⁶⁵ Wilson, 2 January 1944.

⁶⁶ Bernard Haigh, Diary, MSX-3507, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

⁶⁷ Hyde, p. 48.

out on a work assignment, provided men with a break and something else to focus on. Without these physical distractions, men were overwhelmed by constantly worrying about what their futures held.

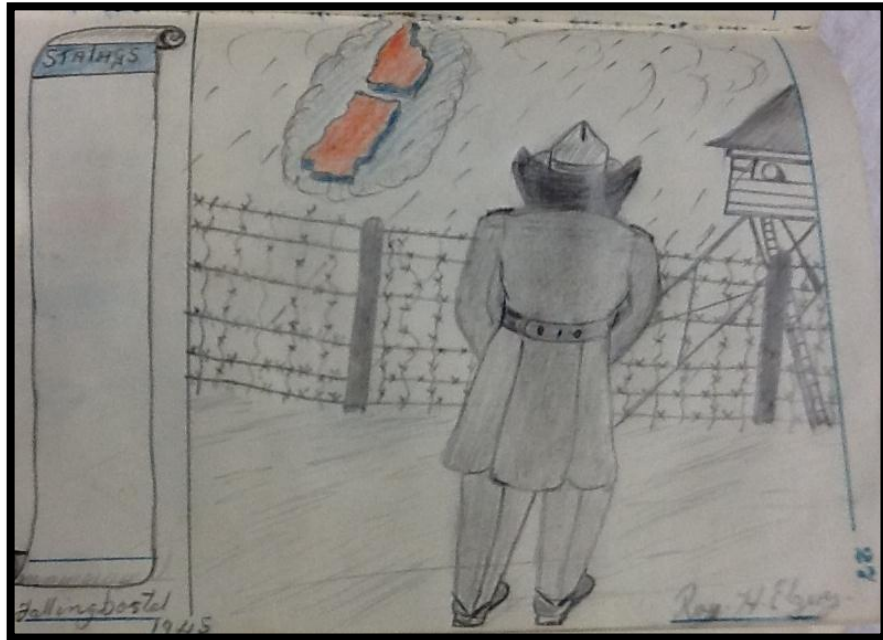


Figure 5.3. A New Zealander dreaming of home.⁶⁸

The image above illustrates how isolated the men were during their captivity, and that their thoughts centred on returning to New Zealand. It was striking that the artist deemed it necessary to portray the POW looking beyond the barbed-wire and watchtower to the vision of New Zealand. This highlighted that even familiar memories of home were tainted by the oppressing camp space. Nevertheless, the warmth of home is apparent because New Zealand is coloured with red and blue pencils. This use of colour is in stark contrast to the shades of grey that dominate the portrayal of the bleak prison camp.

⁶⁸ Frederick Reeve, Diary, 90-348, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

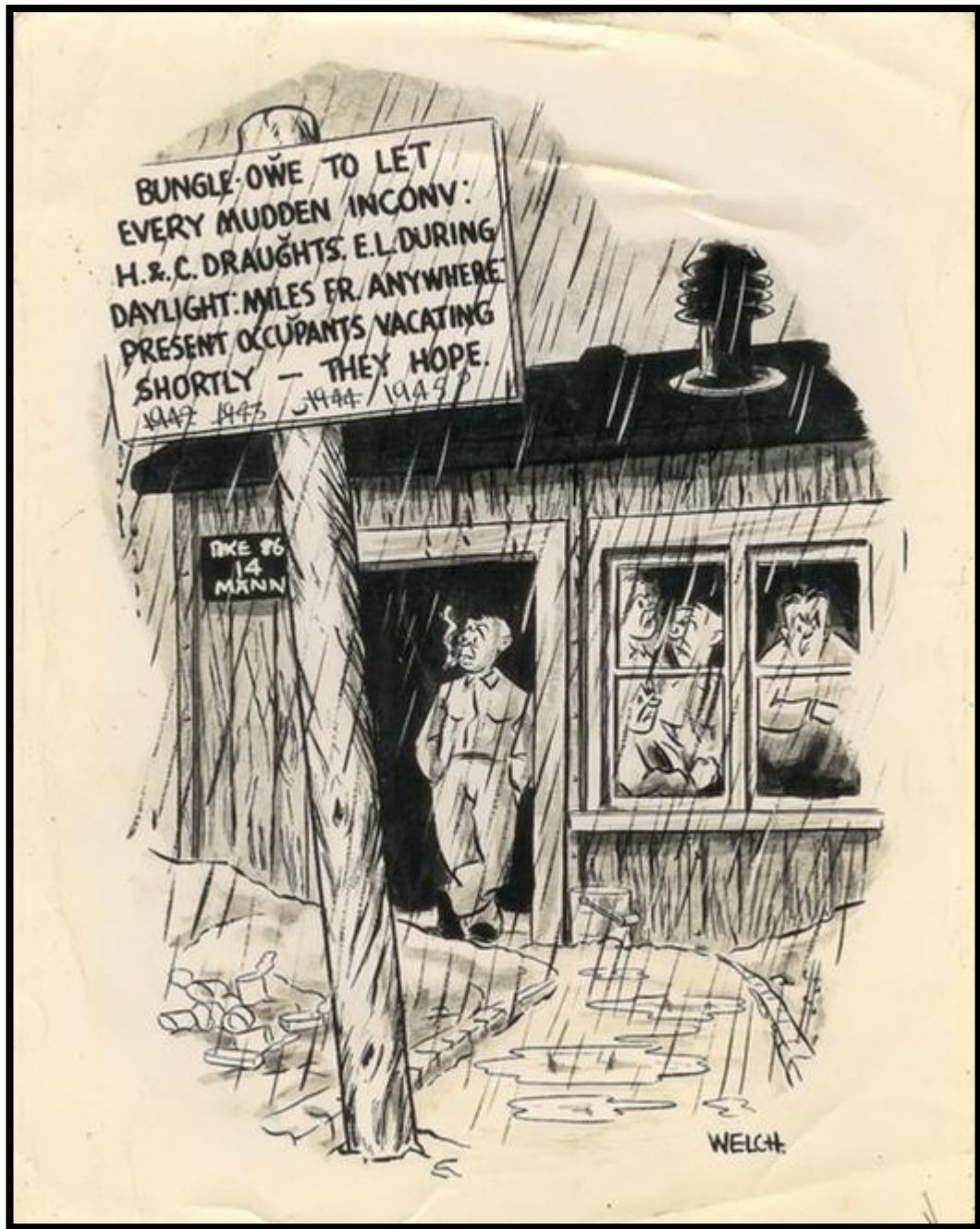


Figure 5.4. “Bungle-owe-to let” by Jim Welch.⁶⁹

Figure 5.4 highlights how men dealt with the uncertainty of their situation. The man in the doorway and the other men at the window are looking out, and their glum expressions tell a tale of frustrated anticipation. The image’s signpost has various dates on it that indicated when the men believed the war would end. In this case, their captivity had begun in 1942 and was still ongoing in 1945. While

⁶⁹ Jim Welch, “Bungle-owe to let”, Graeme Welch Collection, 14-09/1-4, Picture Wairarapa.

serving an unknown sentence, the POWs found anniversaries became key marker points to reflect on the passage of time. Hobbs noted in his diary that as Christmas approached in 1944

we all feel quite sure that we shall be in England for Christmas, which will be the next best thing to being home among our loved ones. When we do arrive home, we sincerely hope early in the New Year, we shall celebrate Christmas all over again making up for the four occasions spent overseas!⁷⁰

Depression during the holidays was evident the longer the men had been imprisoned. Rodger Kearney wrote home in 1943 that, ‘This makes the third Christmas in the bag and for “miserableness” this one beats even the first, which was bad enough. I am not going to attempt to describe it more than that.’⁷¹ Similarly, John Quinlan wrote home in 1942 that, ‘Today my birthday 33 & the last 4 birthdays of mine in the army 2 in captivity. The next one will be in England at the very least I hope.’⁷² As mentioned above, POWs were distressed at how they perceived their lives being wasted in captivity. The loss of being able to celebrate a birthday or Christmas with family led many men to feel depressed. Moreover, when imprisonment lasted for several years, it raised the risk that the men’s loved ones might die while they were in captivity. In many cases, New Zealand POWs learnt of family deaths while in the camps. Private Lawrence Grafton wrote in 1944 that he ‘received a cable from Dad telling me that Mum died on September 1st. I am sending a reply cable through Geneva.’⁷³ Likewise, Private Sydney Burns learnt that his Pop died near the end of the war. He wrote home:

I was quite taken back for a while because I never thought that he wouldn’t be there for my return, as a matter of fact I often used to think of some of the tales I would be able to tell him⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Hobbs, 24 September 1944.

⁷¹ Kearney, 25 December 1943.

⁷² Quinlan, 1 June 1942.

⁷³ Lawrence Grafton, Typescript Diary, MS-Papers-8824, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 10.

⁷⁴ Burns, 20 March 1945.

Burns showed how the death of loved ones affected the POWs' perception of the future. In their years of captivity, the men had imagined how life would be upon their return. This idyllic homecoming contained elements of the men's pasts, including meeting up with friends and loved ones. The men's static lives led some to assume that those back home also lived suspended in time. However, when news of his Pop's death reached the camp, Burns was confronted with the realisation that post-captivity New Zealand would be different to his imagined place.

The sense of missing out on important events was evident in Brier's letters to his sister. Brier enjoyed hearing news about his nieces and nephew, but it also made him 'feel positively old, to [*sic*] old to start, starting a family when I get back'.⁷⁵ As the war dragged on another year, he noted in 1943 that 'I'll be quite a stranger to all my nieces and nephew when I get back, I don't suppose any of them barring possibly Betty will remember me.'⁷⁶ Brier's statements to his sister emphasised his fear of being forgotten. He dreaded how his captivity would affect the rest of his life.

Similar to Brier's letters to his sister, Private J.D. Caves wrote to his girlfriend, Jean, during his imprisonment. Through these letters, it was evident that Caves was concerned that he would be forgotten back home. This was especially apparent when there were unexpected delays in the mail service. Caves wrote to Jean in 1943:

Quite a lot of mail has come in the last few days. None of yours have turned up in this lot - or have you got tired of waiting for me? Many chaps (four) have been deserted by wives and fiancées in this hut since being POW. This cursed war, waiting and strain is hard on all, one could hardly blame a young girl wanting change and diversion, but Dear however hard it is for those of you at home

⁷⁵ Brier, 20 September 1942.

⁷⁶ Brier, 11 April 1943.

you cannot imagine the futile aimless endless drag of life for us here.⁷⁷

Caves revealed that he was unsettled by the uncertainty of his relationship. His inability to reliably contact Jean meant that he waited anxiously for any news from her. The time between messages was agonising, with Caves often succumbing to the bleakest outcome, that Jean had left him.

The continual despair was apparent in some of Caves' later letters to Jean, with him stating in 1944:

Oh darling heart of mine what a long time it is. I hate having kept you waiting and feel that I should have let you free. I love you enough to put your happiness first - could gladly see you marry someone more worthy of you who could give you more. Darling I'm feeling so old and lacking in enthusiasm that I doubt I could make you happy though my love for you will never dim. Let's hope freedom will bring new life and hope. One can hardly visualise a life free from barbed wire now.⁷⁸

Caves' statement was marked with remorse, he felt guilty that his predicament was impacting Jean's life. He needed her, or at least the idea of someone waiting for him at home, to make it through his depressing captivity. However, he recognised that these feelings were selfish, and he continually expressed his sorrow that both of them were restricted by his situation.

It is hard to comprehend the isolation that men like Caves felt toward their loved ones. In many instances, the captivity of New Zealand POWs lasted for most of the war. The length of these sentences no doubt played a role in the men's disconnect and loneliness. Steel noted some of the harsher responses that men received while in captivity, and although it was unclear if these were actual letters

⁷⁷ Paul and Sally Grey, *Private J.D. Caves: The Long Journey Home* (Wellington: New Zealand Electronic Text Collection, 2009), 14 April 1943.

⁷⁸ Caves, 10 February 1944.

from home or based on camp rumours, they highlighted the men's anxiety about being forgotten. One of the responses played upon the POWs' fear of their lovers leaving them, noting that 'I gave birth to a baby boy last week. Stanley is the father. He is sending you 500 cigarettes.'⁷⁹ Another letter confronted their identity as soldiers, with the note stating that 'I married Major W- last month. He works in the war office and is doing so much more for his country than you are.'⁸⁰

These examples, and those of Brier and Caves, indicated that correspondence from home was bittersweet. In most cases, it was great for the men's morale to be reminded that life went on, and that people were anticipating their return home. However, the wait for positive affirmation was excruciating, and sometimes did not come at all. The camp space was confronting, and the mental anguish that men endured was overwhelming. All things considered, communication with pre-war support networks was beneficial to the men's mental health, but it was revealing how despondent POWs felt when they received bad, or no news at all, from home. The extent to which the mental pressures affected POWs has been neglected in New Zealand histories of the period. However, the accounts of the men devoted considerable time describing the agonising details of POWs suffering from mental illnesses, ranging from stress to mental breakdowns.

The candour with which POWs discussed mental health was striking. Many New Zealand accounts described men struggling with mental health issues as going under, wire-happy or round the bend. The close confines of the prison space resulted in POWs being affected by one another's moods. Borrie noted in 1943 that 'we are becoming more "round the bend" as the days pass. It only requires some small incident of any unusual kind to happen in here and everyone brays with hoarse prolonged laughter, interspersed with animal noises.'⁸¹ Borrie seemed to be negatively affected by his hut's emotions, with a further complaint coming a few weeks later:

⁷⁹ John Steel, Diary, MSX-6127, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 49.

⁸⁰ Steel, Diary, p. 49.

⁸¹ Borrie, pp. 172-73.

The room sounds like a kids' party as the participants yell at one another as if they were 400 yards apart. Cat calls, whistling and animal noises are the order of the day. I've 'had' this outfit, as have one or two others.⁸²

Borrie's statements revealed how POWs could be irritable and overly sensitive to small actions. Playful attempts at humour may have entertained some POWs, but others grew tired of this immaturity. The constant stream of noise and interactions reinforced the lack of personal space. POWs were unable to have a moment to themselves, those that craved a quiet solitude were left to bemoan the strange actions of their fellow inmates.

This concept of men affecting one another because of their proximity was an important factor in how the camp space impacted the POW experience. Although they were individuals, it was impossible for them to completely detach themselves from their hut mates. Borrie's fellow inmates appeared to be particularly affected by their captivity, with him noting that, 'One individual who is considered definitely "round the bend" has now taken to ringing up on a fictitious telephone over which he talks to women and customers etc.'⁸³ Similarly, Warrant Officer R.H. Thomson recalled that 'the moaners and whiners and inconsiderate demanders were a very small percentage of the total sufferers, but one snivelling yammerer in a bunch of stoics can make life even more intolerable for all those who hear him.'⁸⁴ Again, these examples showed that the camp space was a communal environment. Thomson suggested that individual complaints could easily affect the wider POW community. He noted how even the most optimistic POWs were demoralised by the constant moaning of one prisoner.

⁸² Borrie, p. 174.

⁸³ Borrie, pp. 137-38.

⁸⁴ R.H. Thomson, *Captive Kiwi* (Auckland: Whitcombe and Tombs Limited, 1964), p. 21.

In rare cases, POWs were repatriated for medical reasons. This possibility of release appeared to incentivise bizarre behaviour. While working with the medical department at Lamsdorf, Private John Bettle recalled that:

One bloke played imaginary billiards on the soccer pitch before a big game and would also wander around the camp playing imaginary golf, teeing up to drive off and putting when he reached the green. However, the Germans were not convinced and he never succeeded in being declared insane.⁸⁵

These accounts of strange behaviour emphasised how the proximity to men struggling with mental fatigue affected other POWs in the camp. The close confines of the camp meant that POWs were left with little choice but to endure the antics of their fellow POWs, while they struggled to maintain their own will to continue.

The camp space was rife with depression, especially considering that some of the men suffered traumatic captures. Captain Harold Smith remembered that night-time was the worst for him, noting that, ‘As soon as the fire went out there was nothing for it but to go to bed, the beginning of a long night, waking often after a nightmare – mine or someone else’s.’⁸⁶ Hardie recalled that prison life was especially tough on airmen. Hardie’s recollections reinforced that there were various factors that could influence a man’s POW experience, including rank and military branch. He noted:

Prison life was not easy on anyone, but most army prisoners hadn’t experienced the sudden shock of going from air force base living in one night. Most had been sometime in frontline conditions and were taken prisoner by other frontline troops who usually were more understanding than the first enemy we encountered.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ John Bettle with Colin Amodeo, *Taking Life as it Comes: A Medical Unit Soldier’s Story* (Christchurch: John Bettle, 1997), pp. 61-62.

⁸⁶ Harold Smith, *Memories of World War II: Experiences of a Junior Officer Greece, Crete, Egypt, Libya and POW* (Kaiaua: Smith Publications, 1996), p. 119.

⁸⁷ Hardie, p. 98.

Hardie suggested that sudden change from airman to captive was confronting. He noted that soldiers were better conditioned for captivity because they had spent weeks living on the frontlines before their capture. This was in contrast to the airmen who had often had spent the night in the relative comfort, and familiarity, of an air force base in Britain.

The often traumatic captures of airmen also meant that they were more likely to suffer from nightmares, with Hardie remembering:

With that number of prisoners, all of whom had recently been shot down, it was a nightly occurrence to hear someone having a nightmare. Even if you were having a dreamless sleep, being awakened by shrieks of someone trying to get out of a burning plane was enough to keep you awake for hours.⁸⁸

It was revealing how men having nightmares affected the mentality of other POWs. Hardie noted that there was a lingering fear that men associated with sleeping. He suggested that when POWs were not having nightmares, they were suffering anxiety about someone else's dream.

In addition to constant complaints and nightmares, personal hygiene was a key indicator to a person's mental health. Galbraith Hyde argued that remaining well-groomed was a way of maintaining a positive outlook. Hyde remembered that it was 'A spit in the face of the world to prove that you are not defeated.'⁸⁹ Even though he insisted on cleanliness, Hyde noted that at Lamsdorf:

One could always tell when someone was getting down into the suicide zone, one of the first things was he stopped washing his clothes.... Then he would stop shaving.... I think the essence of

⁸⁸ Hardie, p. 73.

⁸⁹ Hyde, p. 54.

stopping is that he had ceased to take any interest in how he looked⁹⁰

Private Peter Winter had a similar experience with hygiene and its relationship to mental illness:

The beginnings of mental collapse, or the end of endurance, became distressingly familiar. Long-term prisoners tended to keep themselves clean, neat and tidy even to a point of fastidiousness, a natural reaction to do with maintaining their morale. The first signs that a prisoner was reaching the end of his tether were failure to keep up appearances combined with a tendency to hoard food. Soon the victim would degenerate visibly and become dirty, untidy and pallid. Many of the prisoners affected this way died of pneumonia, 'beriberi' or one of the other diseases awaiting a man who had lost his will to live. Some managed to recover with their companions' help, but many more existed in a state of depression for years. Some were repatriated.⁹¹

Hyde and Winter suggested that POWs used cleanliness to combat the desolation of camp life. Hyde revealed that he kept himself clean as a form of resistance. In these restricting camps, men had little control over their lives, but they were able to dictate how they looked. Maintaining a certain standard of hygiene and physical appearance allowed POWs to improve their self-esteem.

The attention that POWs gave to personal hygiene, and how it related to an individual's well-being, underlined their perception of mental health. That they were able to determine certain warning signs of mental decline was striking. Poor hygiene was a physical marker that let others know that an individual was struggling to cope with captivity. This did not necessarily mean that those suffering would receive help, but it was a reminder to the rest of the camp to

⁹⁰ Hyde, p. 54.

⁹¹ Peter Winter, *Free Lodgings: The true story of a Kiwi soldier's amazing bid for freedom* (Auckland: Reed Books, 1993), p. 104.

maintain their own mental health. Similar to the experiences of Hyde and Winter, Lieutenant Daniel Riddiford remembered that:

In the other camps I had been in, many prisoners had fallen into slovenly habits. Beards of all shapes and sizes had been grown and the practice was to get up as late as possible, go to bed again as soon as breakfast was over and remain in bed till lunch. Not everybody behaved like this, but it was quite common.⁹²

Riddiford suggested that POWs who struggled with captivity were prone to falling into bad habits. He noted that the disregard of personal hygiene was the first step, but was quickly followed by those men retreating from camp activities.

Whether it was the deranged actions of POWs suffering from mental fatigue, or those who simply stopped taking care of their hygiene, the examples above highlighted how negative emotions were sustained in the camp space. Moreover, the POWs' accounts portrayed how one man's emotions could negatively affect another. This revelation strengthens this thesis' argument that the camp space affected the POWs mental well-being. Rather than viewing mental health as a solely individual experience, these accounts emphasised that a more communal approach to the mental health of POWs was required.

In a study about POWs in the American Civil War, economists Dora Costa and Matthew Kahn examined the relationship between survival and connection factors, such as hometown, company and regiment.⁹³ They found that

friends had a statistically significant positive effect on survival probabilities, and that the closer the ties between friends as measured by such identifiers as ethnicity, kinship, and the same hometown, the bigger the affect. Although as crowding increased,

⁹² Daniel Riddiford MC, *Committed to Escape: A New Zealand Soldier's Story* (Martinborough: Ruamahanga Press Ltd, 2004), p. 65.

⁹³ Dora L. Costa and Matthew E. Kahn, 'Surviving Andersonville: The Benefits of Social Networks in POW camps', *The American Economic Review*, 97, 4 (September, 2007), p. 1470.

the accompanying increase in friends could not compensate for the deterioration in camp conditions, it is nonetheless striking that even under such duress, friends continued to have a positive effect on survival probabilities.⁹⁴

Their research highlighted how POWs formed support networks, and how influential these groups were to individual survival. This communal approach to mental health was evident in the accounts of New Zealand POWs, with some men noting how they worked to maintain the mental health of others. Lance Sergeant George Trundle recalled how he tried to make his fellow POWs feel more comfortable. Trundle stated that:

The ones that didn't fit in reached a mental low, an unnatural depression, maybe even a psychological depression. They'd just sit around and look into space. You'd go up and try and have a talk to them, but they wouldn't register very much. They got along. We didn't have any suicides, for example. They were down but not out.⁹⁵

Similarly, Bettie remembered that:

During my first stint at Lamsdorf I had made the effort to go and visit Frank Farthing (from Christchurch) who was really down in the dump and I hoped that my time with him had cheered him up. Now, back at Lamsdorf again, I continued to see him as he was even more depressed and showing the effects of poor food and accommodation and the general malaise of enforced incarceration.⁹⁶

Although Bettie's attempts appeared to be unsuccessful, his efforts highlighted that there were different degrees of mental fatigue, and that the camp space affected some men more than others. Bettie may have been more willing to help others because of his association with medical groups, but it was still revealing

⁹⁴ Costa and Kahn, p. 1482.

⁹⁵ *Inside Stories: New Zealand Prisoners of War Remember*, ed. by Megan Hutching (Auckland: Harper Collins, 2002), p. 154-155.

⁹⁶ Bettie, p. 71.

that he saw it as his responsibility to check on the mental health of his fellow POWs.

Although POWs tended to portray a state of optimism, there was no denying their depressing existence affected their mental health, and in extreme cases, men committed suicide. This aspect of the POW experience has been neglected in histories that tend to favour a romantic depiction of the men's captivity. In many New Zealand primary accounts that this thesis has examined, POWs noted that men were committing suicide in their camps. Hardie remembered that at Lamsdorf, those wanting to kill themselves

needed only to walk over the tripwire as if they were going to climb the double 10-foot fences and it was all over. When it happened at night it was especially hard on the rest of us. When we heard the machine gun open up we would wonder if it was someone we knew. Could we have helped in any way? What had cracked within him?⁹⁷

Hardie had a more personal experience with suicide in the camps, with him witnessing another prisoner commit suicide in front of him. He recalled:

Suddenly my book and legs were splashed with blood. Forbsy was struggling with Mac, who had slashed his neck with a razor and was bleeding profusely, in an apparent suicide attempt.... We were all very sorry for Mac and I think all felt a bit guilty that such a fine chap should have taken that step without any of us having an inkling of his intentions.⁹⁸

These two statements suggested that POWs blamed themselves for being unable to help men who committed suicide. In the aftermath of these deaths, POWs pondered what had led those men to such desperate acts, and if they could have done anything to avert these tragedies. Hardie suggested that POWs, such as his friend Mac, who were contemplating suicide, did not necessarily exhibit any

⁹⁷ Hardie, p. 106.

⁹⁸ Hardie, p. 106.

warning signs. He revealed that at night, when the machine guns fired, he questioned if all his friends would be still there in the morning.

Australian POW Reg Worthington noted in an oral interview his interaction with New Zealand POW Jack Coatsworth. Worthington recalled the different ways confinement affected the men's mental health, noting that

some people coped with hardship and upsets much better than others. Jack was one, it got him down. I suppose it could be said I helped him as much as I could because I knew I was coping mentally better than he was. So I helped him as much as I could but then, later on, I moved away from that camp.⁹⁹

Worthington later heard that Coatsworth had committed suicide and noted that, 'He couldn't take it. As we were marching to the Lazarette every morning, part of the way we marched along a tramline. Jack Coatsworth threw himself under the tram, under the wheels of a tram, coming past him.'¹⁰⁰ Worthington's account revealed how the movement of individual POWs to different camps affected the well-being of other POWs. Support networks took time to establish, but once these connections were made, POWs were able to look after one another. However, these relationships were disrupted when men were moved to work assignments or other camps. In Worthington's case, his movement prevented him from continuing to care for Coatsworth.

The suddenness of most suicides made the entire camp community uneasy, contributing to a depressed camp space. Although sudden, these events tended to linger in the POWs' minds, with many men spending countless hours trying to comprehend why some people were driven to such extremes to escape their captivity. Sergeant Bruce Crowley recalled an instance when a man committed suicide in his camp:

⁹⁹ *War Behind the Wire: Australian Prisoners of War*, ed. by Michael Caulfield (Sydney: Hachette Australia, 2008), p. 267.

¹⁰⁰ Caulfield, p. 267.

His mind had gone. Many blokes were affected like that. Being a prisoner got to you and sometimes you couldn't take it any more. He was quiet chap and probably bottled it all up, like most of us did. You couldn't tell others; they had their own troubles. If he'd told us, we would have stopped him. We wouldn't have barred his escape, but we'd have kept him from killing himself.¹⁰¹

Crowley revealed that POWs were reluctant to talk about their feelings with other prisoners. POWs recognised that captivity was hard on everybody, and rather than combating mental fatigue together, many repressed their emotions and suffered in solitude. Crowley suggested that he and others would have helped men who were suffering, but the shame of approaching another POW was too much for many to overcome.

Similarly, Borrie remembered sitting on a Court of Inquiry in 1944 after a suicide. He noted that the man had

locked himself in a lavatory, tied a sheet round the cistern and his neck, then jumped down from the seat. Such acts reflected the general build-up of tension. With the quickly changing war news, most P.O.W.s were more on edge, just as in those 1941 days of early captivity. The static existence of '42 and '43 had changed doubts and fears: I prayed for strength to maintain a sense of proportion.¹⁰²

Borrie suggested that suicides reflected the uncertainty of the POW experience, and the men's inability to express their fears. He noted how many men were disoriented by the rapid shifts in the war's situation. In these moments of uncertainty, Borrie found solace in prayer, and that one day he would be freed.

¹⁰¹ Julia Millen, *North to Apricots: The Escape Stories of Sergeant Bruce Crowley DCM New Zealand Prisoner of War Greece & Germany 1941-1943* (Wellington: Bocoman Ltd, 2012), p. 57.

¹⁰² Borrie, pp. 202-03.

In another instance, Hyde remembered many POWs who committed suicide, and the warning signs that occurred in the prior days:

he would get completely shut off from others, avoiding contact as far as it was possible in the circumstances. Then suddenly one morning we would find he had cut his wrists or hung himself on a home made cord of Red Cross string either in the compound dunny or in the wash room overnight.¹⁰³

Hyde tried to comprehend why men were killing themselves, and why others were not doing more to stop them. He concluded that

all prisoners suffer from 'black despair' in some degree. With us a big factor was not knowing the length of the sentence. Or for that matter what the end would be. Some were more successful than others in this fight; but perhaps none of us had any mental energy left over from own personal battle to help others who maybe were in danger of losing the struggle?¹⁰⁴

Hyde argued that POWs were responsible for their own mental health. He noted that all prisoners suffered dark thoughts, in which they were overwhelmed by the uncertainty of their situation. Hyde revealed that these battles with despair were a solitary experience, and that individuals were dependent on themselves to overcome their depression. Although he makes this statement, his account was tinged with guilt over the community's inability to help those that were suffering from mental fatigue. Hyde reasoned that it was exhausting looking after your own health, let alone worrying about someone else. Still, his memories revealed how suicides affected the POW experience. POWs spent the subsequent days and years questioning whether or not they could have done more to help those individuals.

Remoteness also contributed to mental fatigue, and in some cases suicide. The men were isolated from events beyond the wire, and early reports of Axis

¹⁰³ Hyde, p. 55.

¹⁰⁴ Hyde, p. 55.

advances affected their morale. In an interview decades after the war, Aircraftman Alan Jones described how helpless the men felt in the captivity:

I don't think anyone can visualise what it was like over there. Everything was going against us. The Germans were winning the war, they were sinking more ships. Then when the Japanese came in, we were so far away and so helpless, and if they had invaded New Zealand, we could visualise what was going to happen to our wives and sweethearts. It was so frustrating. The Japanese were sweeping through, coming right down, and the [Germans] were right up to Stalingrad. There was no future at all. We would never see New Zealand again. One or two guys committed suicide. You could see them building up to it, too. It was just getting them down, and you knew something was going to happen.¹⁰⁵

Jones suggested that negative news from the war forced POWs to consider the bleakest outcomes. While isolated from the war in captivity, reports of Allied defeats compounded the men's fears that they had failed in their attempt to defend their loved ones. Some men prepared themselves for the worst, that New Zealand would be invaded. Jones noted how men despaired over the war situation, and that this uncertainty was too much for some POWs to endure.

The above testimonies detailing suicides in the camp space highlighted the common fear that was held by the POWs, that anyone was susceptible to going under, and eventually committing suicide. Men reasoned that they were unable to help those suffering from severe depression because it took all their energy to keep their own spirits up. In some instances men were able to band together to maintain each other's mental health. However, there was always the chance that one would isolate himself from the group, and lose the struggle. The frequency of suicide in the camp space emphasised the immense mental pressures that captivity placed on the POWs. In previous chapters, this thesis has shown how POWs impacted the camp space and made it more familiar. However, the accounts of

¹⁰⁵ Hutching (Auckland: Harper Collins, 2002), p. 60.

declining mental health and suicide shed light on how the camp space affected the men.

In summary, the camp space proved detrimental to the men's mental health. The claustrophobic conditions, coupled with the isolation from pre-war support networks, left many men feeling depressed or worse. Histories of New Zealand POWs have tended to be centred on more romantic aspects of captivity, such as escapes and sabotage, and have neglected the immense mental pressures that the men endured during their captivity. Narratives about mental fatigue, isolation and, in some cases, suicides make for an uncomfortable portrayal of the POW experience, albeit an accurate one. This chapter has highlighted how isolated the camp space was, and how the men's emotions were affected by their remoteness. Moreover, it showed that some POWs were willing to discuss the signs of mental distress, and in some instances how help was provided to those in need.

The chapter explored how POWs stayed connected to war by keeping up to date with its progress. The attention the men showed towards the war alluded to a rediscovery of their soldierly identities. However, it was important to note that almost all the men examined for this study showed little enthusiasm for returning to the frontlines. Instead, they tracked the progress of the war so that they could better determine how much longer they needed to endure their captivity. Through their interest in the war, the POWs showed remarkable insight into conflict in general. Most men developed an utter distaste for war, and lamented the impact that it had on their lives, and the civilians in the surrounding areas.

Even though the POWs remained interested in events outside the camp, their isolation and unknown sentences proved too much for many men. The mental fatigue was clear in those men who stopped looking after their physical appearance. The revelation that POWs identified men who were suffering from mental illness through their personal hygiene showed a surprisingly nuanced comprehension of mental health. To combat the pressures of camp life, POWs

noted that they banded together in order to look out for one another's mental state. However, even though groups were established to provide emotional support, the occurrence of suicides in many POW accounts indicated that the pressures became too much for some men.

This chapter has shown that throughout their captivity, POWs suffered severe mental fatigue, and that their isolation was compounded by the remoteness of their camps. New Zealanders had limited communication with their pre-war support networks and were constantly worried about being forgotten. Through this correspondence POWs reconnected with their pre-war lives, providing them with comfort during their long captivity. The next chapter explores the final stages of the POW experience, with many New Zealanders being forced to leave their camps and march westwards as the Russians advanced from the east.

Chapter Six - On the Road

Possibly we are getting somewhere. Who knows? Uncle Joe has been left behind and we do not hear the sound of big guns now.¹

Throughout their captivity, men idealised their eventual release. This chapter examines the third stage of the men's experience as they transitioned out of captivity. Although this moment was keenly anticipated, the POWs faced many hardships before they were finally freed. As Nazi Germany's position in the war deteriorated in 1944-45, German authorities ordered much of the POW population to move westward to avoid being overrun by Russian forces. These transfers saw tens of thousands of POWs forcibly marched for days, weeks and months. New Zealand POWs were affected by these moves, with many men documenting their experiences on the marches. Private Jack Gallichan's statement, which opens this chapter, emphasised how the uncertainty that POWs faced during these marches compounded the physical hardships of this jarring experience. Mobility is a distinct theme throughout the men's narratives, but it is important to note that they possessed little agency. Although the prisoner-guard power relationship shifted during these marches, the guards still dictated to the POWs where and when they would march. This chapter will provide a nuanced analysis of the men's experiences on the forced marches. It highlights the uncertainty, economic deprivation and unfamiliar spaces that the POWs endured during their last moments of captivity outside the wire.

The forced movement of the marches was reminiscent of the long treks men endured during their capture in Greece, Crete and North Africa. The POWs expected to move through spaces that had elements of familiarity. However, on the forced marches the men encountered a war-torn countryside that conflicted

¹ Jack Gallichan, *From the Tunnel to the Light: Diary of a New Zealand Prisoner-of-War*, MS 1145, Auckland War Memorial Museum Library, p. 15.

with their vision of life beyond the wire. These unfamiliar spaces were particularly disorienting to the men's identities, because they had just left a POW camp that they were able to shape into a more comfortable space. This chapter argues that the spaces that the POWs visited during these marches were disorienting because they differed from the men's expectations of civilised life. This divergence provided men with a stronger will to return to New Zealand, where they believed the war would become a distant memory.

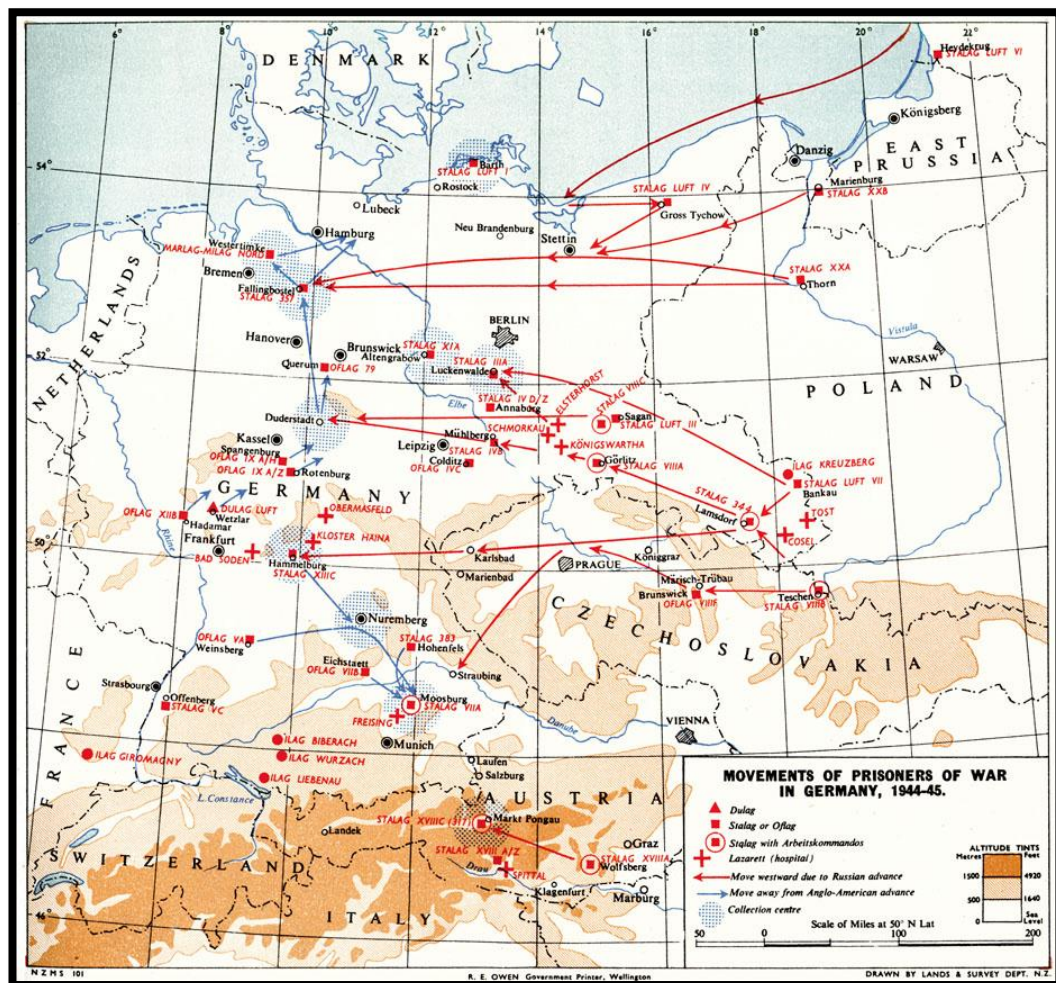


Figure 6.1. Movements of Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany, 1944-45.²

² W. Wynne Mason, *Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939-1945: Prisoners of War* (Wellington: War History Branch, Dept. of Internal Affairs, 1954), p. 355.

Before being ordered to leave their camps during the winter of 1944-45, POW life continued as normal, but there was an added level of uneasiness about how captivity would end. Some men wondered whether they would be held as hostages, others did not concern themselves with the details of their release and just hoped the end would come soon. Sergeant Pilot Jack Rae recalled that at Stalag Luft III:

The atmosphere in the camp during the latter months of 1944 was a strange mixture of relief and apprehension. Relief that at last the war was reaching its final stages and apprehension as to how this craziness would finally end.³

Most POWs received the news to move out with trepidation. Rae evoked the uncertainty that the men experienced, recalling that, ‘We were not to be left behind for the Russian advance troops to liberate. Instead we were to be evacuated, on foot. But to where? Nobody seemed to know. And why the hell a night march?’⁴ Similar to the men’s experiences during their initial capture, POWs faced an uncertain future. It was unclear where they would be moved to or when they would arrive at their destination.

Compounding the men’s uncertainty was their lack of agency. Although they were moving, these actions were dictated to them by the guards and, to some degree, by their own superior officers. Gallichan, who started the march from his work camp in Milwitz, Poland, described how men dealt with the daily uncertainty on the march:

To drift along these frozen trails, not knowing how long the trail will be or where we are going, introduces hopelessness into our daily marches and we don’t want that. We want to look at the German postens and be able to say ‘You may be carrying the rifle, Jerry, but we are carrying the laugh.’ We just have to keep our spirits up and realise that each step along these frozen highways is

³ Jack Rae, *Kiwi Spitfire Ace: A Gripping World War II Story of Action, Captivity and Freedom* (London: Grub Street, 2001), p. 147.

⁴ Rae, p. 148.

a step nearer home, and peace, and comfort, and the smell of good cooking.⁵

Gallichan's statement provided a distinct contrast between the POWs' desperate situation on the forced marches and the safety of their imagined future. The marches took place during winter, with minimal food to sustain the men. The desolate conditions strained the POWs, physically and mentally. In their hopeless position, the POWs imagined the peace and comfort that awaited them at home. Thoughts of warm food and a return to civilian life provided sustenance when the situation looked bleak. Similarly, Sergeant John Hogg recalled that on the march, 'We had something to live for, a country and home to encourage us to go on, as each day we looked to the future.'⁶ These two statements emphasised that POWs sought mental refuge in the knowledge that with each passing day, they were one step closer to liberation. Private Bernard Haigh noted that, 'At first most of us expected a week march, but our hopes were soon rudely shattered.'⁷ In the moment, it was unknown how long they would be marching, but the ability to focus on the war's inevitable end was comforting.

The uncertainty and lack of organisation on the marches provided POWs with ample opportunities to escape. However, Haigh stated that, 'Most of us thought the wisest plan was to stick to the column, as there we knew the eye of the International Red Cross was seeing what was going on.'⁸ This statement suggested POWs continued to form groups similar to those they had established in their camps, and they believed that they would receive better treatment if the Germans remained responsible for them. The need to stay with the majority indicated that the men found a sense of security in the company of other POWs. It also spoke to the isolation that many of the POWs experienced. There were

⁵ Gallichan, p. 17.

⁶ John Hogg, *An Honourable Surrender: A New Zealand Soldier Remembers* (Tauranga: Bay Officer Centre Printers Ltd, 1992), p. 62.

⁷ Bernard Haigh, Unpublished Manuscript, 4556, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 1.

⁸ Haigh, p. 1.

instances when men were informed of Allied advances, but for the most part they were isolated from the world beyond the POW space.

Years of restricted mobility and malnutrition had sapped the men of their physical strength. The winter conditions that POWs were forced to march through made an almost unbearable task near impossible. Journalist and biographer Midge Gillies noted that some men felt liberated as they moved outside the wire, but:

The thrill of being on the other side of the barbed wire soon gave way to the despair of struggling through blizzards and temperatures that at times fell to seventeen degrees below zero in Germany's worst winter for fifty years.⁹

This statement was often echoed by New Zealand POWs, like Rae, who noted that in his experience, 'March is hardly the right word. It was more a painful and extremely slow shuffle as the cold began to chill hands and feet.'¹⁰ He went further by recalling that, 'It is difficult to convey just how much we had deteriorated and how poor our physical state. Without exception everyman was skeleton thin, listless and very dirty.'¹¹

The winter conditions made the POWs susceptible to illness and injury, with Haigh noting that, 'Boots became soaking wet during the day, and each morning for many weeks we woke up to find our boots frozen stiff as iron in the cold and almost impossible to put on.'¹² Haigh continued, 'Soon a worse evil crept in – frostbite in the feet and hands. Hundreds of men must have lost toes or fingers'.¹³ These injuries allowed men to leave the march, with the Germans transferring them to nearby hospitals. Haigh stated that the group's medical officer 'did what

⁹ Midge Gillies, *The Barbed-Wire University: The Real Lives of Allied Prisoners of War in the Second World War* (London: Aurum Press Limited, 2011), p. 378.

¹⁰ Rae, p. 149.

¹¹ Rae, p. 154.

¹² Haigh, pp. 1-2.

¹³ Haigh, p. 2.

he could to get sick men away to hospitals, but the Germans only allowed the worst cases to go, and many men had to carry on in sickness.’¹⁴

Even though the POWs had to deal with the uncertainty of the marches and the crippling weather conditions, some men prepared the best they could for a prolonged excursion. Many POWs were able to gather supplies before leaving their camps. Lance Corporal Tony Vercoe remembered that, ‘Most of us had been able to bring foodstuffs with us, which was just as well. Any Jerry rations were forthcoming only about every second day, and sparse at that. Inevitably foraging took place along the route.’¹⁵ Similarly, Private Doug Tiffen recalled that ‘Some, who had used a bit of foresight, had joined together into small groups and procured sledges for the transport of their gear.’¹⁶ Rae’s group was well-organised, with him noting:

Our group knew exactly what to take and what to leave. Heavy cans were kept to a minimum. Sugar was grabbed in quantity, as were chocolates and raisins. The key item that most overlooked in their panic was cigarettes. We had already figured out that these would have valuable purchasing power.¹⁷

These accounts suggested that POWs hoarded goods, both to consume and to trade. The foresight to gather commodities that could be traded showed how some groups of POWs lessened the uncertainty of their situation. The men gained agency by increasing their economic freedom. In doing so, they were not solely reliant on German rations to survive.

¹⁴ Haigh, p. 2.

¹⁵ Tony Vercoe, *Yesterdays Drums: Echoes from the Wasteland of War* (Wellington: Steele Roberts Ltd, 2001), p. 189.

¹⁶ Doug Tiffen, Typescript Diary, MS-Papers-4394, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 1.

¹⁷ Rae, p. 148.

While some prisoners viewed goods as commodities for survival, Flight Lieutenant Owen Foster remembered the painful memories of leaving behind one's valuable possessions at Stalag Luft III:

We had to pack our kits with the bare necessities as we had to pack everything to carry on our backs. It broke my heart to leave behind such a lot of material that I had collected in the way of notes on farming etc. and plans of buildings I had drawn.¹⁸

More than the loss of material goods, Foster's statement indicated that he found it hard to abandon the life he had constructed. While moving camps was normal for prisoners, the forced marches represented a complete break from these relatively stable places; the men were once again thrust out on to the road with their destination unknown.

In their haste, however, many POWs gathered more possessions than they could carry, and as the march progressed the men began to cast aside their valuables. Private Eric Gallagher remembered these cases of dumping, stating, 'A minority start out with a tremendous pack of food and clothing, which is dumped on the roadside from day to day.'¹⁹ Likewise, Sergeant Pilot Jack Hardie recalled that, 'Most of the prisoners found they were overloaded and had thrown away anything they thought was not essential. Books were the first to go and there were many handwritten journals of the owners' and others' experiences thrown away.'²⁰ In their camps, POWs carefully maintained their personal possessions. The camps were relatively safe, so POWs treasured books and other luxury items which made their lives more comfortable. Intricate journals were written and letters from loved ones were preserved. These mementos were valued as reminders of home, and of the men's captivity. But on the marches, the harsh conditions led POWs to throw away everything that was not needed to survive. Basic human needs such as food,

¹⁸ Owen Foster, Unpublished Manuscript, MS-Papers-8223, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 62.

¹⁹ Eric J. Gallagher, *Across Europe: Narrative of a Journey* (Mount Maunganui: E.J. Gallagher, 1995), p. 3.

²⁰ Jack Hardie, *From Timaru to Stalag VIII B: A Kiwi Airman's Wartime Story* (Wellington: Steele Roberts Ltd, 2009), p. 118.

warm clothing and shelter took priority over camp comforts. Items which held value in the camp space were left on the roadsides of Europe.



Figure 6.2. Allied POWs on the road during a forced march.²¹

Figure 6.2. illustrates POWs marching along an undisclosed road in Europe, with their supply carts in tow. The men appear to be surrounding their carts, indicating that they belonged to their group, rather than to all the marchers. The photograph's portrayal of the barren landscape is also telling. A lone tree features prominently, perhaps highlighting the foreignness of the spaces that the men visited during the marches. It also alludes to the dearth of supplies on the marches. In these barren landscapes, foraging for extra food was limited. Therefore, what the men carried with them became even more important.

²¹ Hill, Leighton McLeod, 1907-1952. Allied prisoners of war on road during forced march - Photograph taken by Lee Hill. New Zealand. Department of Internal Affairs. War History Branch: Photographs relating to World War 1914-1918, World War 1939-1945, occupation of Japan, Korean War, and Malayan Emergency. Ref: 1/4-069790-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22768398>.

After years of malnutrition physically weakened the men, the ability to carry possessions became a central concern for POWs, and, as Tiffen noted, sledges enabled them to transport a greater amount supplies. This point was supported by Gallichan, who noted that:

Halfway through the march the weight of my pack became unbearable and I followed the example of others and bought a sledge off a young Polish lad for a cake of chocolate. I had to leave the ranks to do it and just escaped getting ‘crowned’ with the rifle butt of Ginger the posten. It was a tremendous relief to get the pack off my shoulders. Others bought sledges too.²²

The scarcity of supplies meant that it was a huge advantage if your group had a sledge, because it enabled more goods to be accumulated and transported.

For many POWs the use of sledges proved to be a form of economic hierarchy that divided groups of men into sledge owners and non-sledge owners. In Rae’s account, he mentioned that he began the journey with a sledge, but eventually had to abandon it as the men’s health deteriorated. He remembered that:

Regretfully we loaded our valuable possessions into our backpacks and left that beautiful sledge lying on the side of the road, conscious that we no longer belonged to a privileged class. We were now just stumbling, laden Kriegies like all the rest.²³

Rae’s suggestion that POWs who had sledges were economically advantaged supports this thesis’ previous arguments about the economics within POW camps. Throughout the POW experience, deprivation and scarcity of goods were constants, so it was understandable that these hardships continued to torment the men beyond the camp space. Life on the marches was precarious, with many POWs noting the lack of food. In this economic climate, many POWs adopted a selfish mentality in order to survive.

²² Gallichan, p. 3.

²³ Rae, p. 153.

Similar to the economic environment of the POW camps, the long marches were troubled by instances of petty thieving. Staff Sergeant John Hobbs noted in his diary that:

As a result of this acute shortage of food, tempers became badly frayed, expressions became gaunt, and we all got thin, drawn, and low in health and spirits. The boys became so desperate that some resorted to thieving the rations of their own kith and kin.²⁴

Likewise, Gallichan noted that the offenders usually came from positions of power:

Some of the boys stole a lot of meat and wurst off the ration cart and, as a result, our individual issue was cut down. Individuals in a starving mob have no principles. Bugger you, mate, I'm all right. This has always been particularly noticeable in P.O.W. life. Everything goes by the board and man descends [*sic*] to that animal state from which, he claims, Christianity and brotherhood have lifted him. And usually, in this life, the main offenders are the sergeants and the sergeant-majors, who use their rank to advantage themselves at the expense of all the others. It has always been that way. It disgusts me.²⁵

Gallichan's statement rejected the notion that men banded together to survive. Instead, he suggested that when faced with difficult conditions, POWs often descended into a more primitive, selfish state. Gallichan's allusion to Christian civility and brotherhood was overshadowed by the individual's need to survive. In this desperate state, Gallichan looked to the officers for leadership, but realised that they were just as corruptible as the common soldier, if not more so.

Narratives of POWs taking advantage of one another contradicts the more romantic histories that portray men banding together in solidarity. Authors John

²⁴ John Hobbs, Diary, MS-Papers-3958-2, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 118.

²⁵ Gallichan, pp. 14-15.

Nichol and Tony Rennell examined the experiences of POWs on the forced marches and concluded that:

Their stories were similar, but each man's struggle was his own, a unique battle to survive, assisted by a collective determination not to give in. You helped the man next to you as you plodded on through the snow, head down, each foot forward a triumph of will-power, getting through the ordeal as best you could.²⁶

Whereas Nichol and Rennell emphasised the camaraderie of the POW experience, this study has argued that POWs were more than willing to support themselves at the expense of others. And although the men who stole from others may have been in the minority, their actions resulted in increased anxiety and suspicion. Haigh stated that, 'Petty thieving became rampant, and no one would leave his slender store of food or clothing unguarded for a minute.'²⁷ The lack of supplies and subsequent stealing created an uncomfortable atmosphere where POWs took advantage of one another. Even after the arrival of Red Cross parcels, when supplies were in relative abundance, men still resorted to stealing. Tiffen noted a contrasting scene when at first 'Much cheerful cursing was indulged in as 300 of us struggled in and out of the bed area in the dark to get the parcels.'²⁸ However, later in the night, 'four different men had food stolen from them.'²⁹ That these accounts have been neglected in New Zealand's war histories highlights a willingness by many authors to construct a narrative that fits within the popular perception of New Zealanders banding together. This thesis has continually rebuffed these romantic portrayals as misleading by emphasising the more confronting aspects of captivity.

In most cases, POWs divided themselves into groups to protect themselves from dishonest activity. However, this co-operation did not alleviate the constant distrust among most POWs. Instead, Tiffen recalled that, 'Most of the men have

²⁶ John Nichol and Tony Rennell, *The Last Escape: The Untold Story of Allied Prisoners of War in Germany 1944-45* (London: Viking, 2002), p. 75.

²⁷ Haigh, p. 4.

²⁸ Tiffen, p. 12.

²⁹ Tiffen, p. 12.

formed into small groups for their mutual aid – but there is no co-operation between groups. Every group is out to get as much for itself as it can.’³⁰ During the marches, these groups were instrumental to many men’s survival. In Tiffen’s account, he made little mention about his ability to trade goods, but praised the other members of his group, noting that their actions were essential to maintaining well-being. Tiffen stated that, ‘Cliff was able to put through deals and keep us in bread when many of the others went without: and it was chiefly owing to Peter that we had a supply of tea and coffee for trading purposes.’³¹ Likewise, Haigh noted how trading influenced the cut-throat nature of life on the road, stating that:

During the march the quick witted and unscrupulous fared the best. The slower ones missed out on the small extras going. We had to get extra food by buying, begging or stealing. Trading was a good means of getting extra as for a shirt or singlet or pullover you might get a few pounds of bread, oatmeal, potatoes or such-like.³²

Haigh’s statement suggested that POWs had to be selfish to survive. The men had to be willing to take any opportunity to improve their situation. As Haigh noted, an extra piece of clothing or slice of bread made a significant difference to a person’s outlook. Although the competition for supplies added another layer to the hierarchies of POWs, the ability to trade allowed some men to distinguish themselves as individuals based on their ability to barter and trade.

³⁰ Tiffen, p. 5.

³¹ Tiffen, p. 11.

³² Haigh, p. 3.



Figure 6.3. A group of POWs bartering with civilians.³³

The above photograph portrays POWs mixing with the local population on an overnight stop in an undisclosed village. Unlike other groups, this collection of POWs appear to have been granted agency to spend their spare time as they liked. In some of these instances, there were rare occasions when POWs had dinner with the locals. Tiffen noted that at one of their stops, his group ‘gave the farmer’s wife some of our macaroni and dried vegs. and she half cooked it without using salt. It was very insipid, but warm and filling.’³⁴

Although groups divided the men, they provided crucial support networks for the POWs. In Tiffen’s experience, his group was immensely loyal to one another, with him noting that on one occasion:

³³ Hill, Leighton McLeod, 1907-1952. Allied prisoners of war bartering for food - Photograph taken by Lee Hill. New Zealand. Department of Internal Affairs. War History Branch: Photographs relating to World War 1914-1918, World War 1939-1945, occupation of Japan, Korean War, and Malayan Emergency. Ref: 1/4-069791-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22737306>.

³⁴ Tiffen, p. 5.

I felt ill and couldn't eat my black bread. Peter gave me his sausage – which was a bigger sacrifice than most people can well imagine – and looked after me generally. I was a pretty glum travelling companion at that time.³⁵

These accounts emphasised how the relationships that the men had developed within their camps continued to impact their experience beyond the wire. Tiffen's group had been conditioned to look after their close friends, and this support was necessary to survive the hardships of the forced marches.

As it was in the POW camps, rumours and speculation were rampant whenever it appeared that someone was getting more than his fair share. Notably, the cooks were often targets of social derision when supplies became scarce. Gallichan noted:

Red Cross parcel food is now very low and, as Jerry rations are running out, things are getting grim. Our staff wallahs can always turn on a good meal for themselves because they are able to contact the civvies and are thus able to obtain food by trade. They seem so disinclined to help others that everybody is getting brownd off with them.³⁶

Similar to Gallichan's suggestion that the cooks had it better than other POWs, Tiffen noted the hardships that many of the POWs endured, recalling that, 'Men struggle for the swede peelings as they are wheeled out of the kitchen.'³⁷ He contrasted the men's lack of supplies to the relative abundance that the cooks enjoyed. Tiffen remembered that food was so disproportionally distributed that, 'The well-fed cooks tried to get a game of football up: but got no players from the 400 Kiwis in this room – only a lot of derision.'³⁸

³⁵ Tiffen, p. 6.

³⁶ Gallichan, p. 10.

³⁷ Tiffen, p. 14.

³⁸ Tiffen, p. 14.

In addition to the daily struggle to cope with the bad weather, lack of supplies and mental fatigue, the POWs were confronted by the dynamics of the prisoner-guard power relationship changing. This change was highlighted as the men passed through many small towns and fraternised with the civilian population. Gallichan was complimentary about the reception that his group received from the local population. He noted:

There is no doubting the kindness of these Czeck [*sic*] people. The bauers and their fraus want to help us as much as they can but contact with them is now very much restricted because of the rigid surveillance of the postens.³⁹

Similarly, Gallagher remembered the steps that the guards took to isolate the men from these positive experiences, noting that ‘we were deliberately marched around villages and towns and not through them, in order to stop this show of friendliness and sympathy.’⁴⁰ Likewise, Private Harry Hanson wrote to his mother that:

When we came into Czechoslovakia we thought we were in heaven, the people came from the houses and threw food. We were badly in need of it too but the rotten guards took their rifle butts and threatened to use hand grenades on the people⁴¹

Tiffen also had a friendly experience with locals, noting that, ‘People in the streets of towns we passed through, tossed us pieces of bread and cigarettes, until the guards stopped them. The people were very good and tried all ways to give us bread even then.’⁴² But even these moments were often ruined by violence, with Tiffen stating that ‘a guard killed one of our chaps for allegedly leaving the ranks, and some of them usually fired if they saw us make a move to get something.’⁴³ Gallichan was witness to this murder, and noted that it affected the men for the duration of the march. He stated:

³⁹ Gallichan, p. 38.

⁴⁰ Gallagher, p. 7.

⁴¹ Harry Hanson, Letter Collection, 2000.580, The Kippenberger Military Archive, Waiouru, New Zealand, p. 2.

⁴² Tiffen, p. 6.

⁴³ Tiffen, p. 6.

And, by the way, nobody now leaves the ranks to get bread or food from the civvies who have it to offer and who cannot understand why we do not take it. If they only knew how greatly we want the food they have for us, if they only knew what the consequence would be if we left the ranks to get it, they would cease to wonder. One life has been lost because we panicked once before and we feel responsibility for it.⁴⁴

These statements revealed a disturbing experience that POWs had when they were walked through villages. Civilians appeared willing to provide food and hospitality to the POWs, but the men were unable to receive it because the restrictions of captivity still governed their actions.

Some accounts detailed civilian interactions more than others, and this could be attributed to POWs having different experiences because of the men guarding them. In Gallichan's diary, encounters with locals were frequent. He noted that he often saw 'civvies trying to help, fellows finding ways to contact them, good postens turning their backs and the bad ones yelling orders as only a perverted Jerry can. If it was not so serious it would be funny.'⁴⁵ This concept of some guards allowing POWs more agency than other guards was mentioned by many accounts. The camp space was dominated by a distinct guard-prisoner power relationship, and both sides knew their responsibilities. However, beyond the wire on these forced marches, the power relationships were unclear. It was obvious that the guards were still in control, but the inevitable end to the war and shared living conditions gave another level of uncertainty to the POW experience.

The shared living space between POWs and guards led to more interactions and, over time, a deterioration of German morale. Hobbs noted that the guards 'had to put up with much the same conditions as we did, and naturally were not at all pleased with this forced marching.'⁴⁶ The guards inevitably endured similar

⁴⁴ Gallichan, p. 37.

⁴⁵ Gallichan, p. 43.

⁴⁶ Hobbs, p. 115.

hardships to the POWs, with Vercoe remembering that, as his march ended, the guards were in as bad shape as the POWs. He noted that:

The march degenerated to a straggle as the blokes became progressively footsore and dogweary. About every chain along both sides of the column were guards with rifles or submachine guns. A few of the older ones were in about as poor shape as many of our lads.⁴⁷

Furthermore, as the POWs' liberation neared, Vercoe recalled that:

Some of the guards were beginning to act uncharacteristically, discernible first as a restlessness, an effect which spread to others, until most of them were nervous and twitchy. Before long they'd begun to canvass us, seeking our confirmation that they had always treated us humanely and considerately.⁴⁸

The guards' desire to reaffirm their reputation showed a concern for their well-being, as well as a final attempt to influence the POWs' captive experience. The guards urged the POWs to remember that they were treated well, alluding to a realisation that the power relationship was changing. Like Vercoe, Hogg stated that, 'The German guards' attitudes were changing towards us, some even becoming kind and friendly. I suppose they, like us, knew the end was near.'⁴⁹ In these moments, POWs attained power over their situation and were forced to reflect on their captivity. This resulted in a decision that affected the way POWs represented the guards in their post-war accounts, forgiveness or revenge.

In another instance of the uncertain power relationships on the march, Rae recalled when the guards left his group alone in a small village, and his first thought was to 'see if we could buy anything with our cigarettes from a small store.'⁵⁰ However, this moment of normality was brief, with Rae noting that, 'Into the midst of this pleasant place there suddenly drove carloads of black-garbed SS

⁴⁷ Vercoe, p. 189.

⁴⁸ Vercoe, pp. 189-90.

⁴⁹ Hogg, p. 63.

⁵⁰ Rae, p. 151.

troops with weapons drawn. At gunpoint we were ordered to leave immediately. It was a brutal return to reality.’⁵¹ From Rae’s account, it appeared that in one moment prisoners enjoyed relative freedom, only for it to be suddenly taken away with the appearance of stricter guards. This constant change reflected a power relationship that was unclear. As previously mentioned, part of this uncertainty was due to the increased interactions between the POWs and the guards. Regardless, the blurred power relationships beyond the wire proved distressing for the POWs. Although the men experienced moments that reminded them of their pre-war lives, they were regularly brought back to the grim reality of captivity.

In addition to these strange meetings with civilians, Hobbs noted that the desolation that he and his fellow POWs encountered throughout the march was confronting. It became such a problem that Hobbs contended that, ‘Because of their deserted appearance, the lack of attractive shop windows, the haunted look of the people, as well as the cobbled streets, we did not enjoy marching through the towns.’⁵² Hobb’s contention that the foreignness of these villages was disturbing was similar to Gallichan’s experience, with him noting that:

The towns through which we pass appear to be ‘straggly’, and it seems that the old has been in them so long that the new cannot push it out. I take an interest in the shops we pass. They are almost empty and look forlorn.⁵³

Furthermore, Gallichan remembered a particularly foreboding atmosphere overcame his group while they stayed at Branka. He stated:

At Branka here we are all together at a state farm and the whole place seems to be doing its best to make our plight worse. If buildings can jeer at anybody then this place is jeering at us....They tell us we will be staying here tomorrow. I am not very enthusiastic over the prospect – it’s too bleak, cold, muddy, slushy and miserable.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Rae, p. 152.

⁵² Hobbs, p. 111.

⁵³ Gallichan, p. 23.

⁵⁴ Gallichan, p. 13.

Gallichan's description of the accommodation at Branka showed how foreign spaces affected the POW experience. This stop provided some much needed shelter, but Gallichan noted that the buildings jeered at them, making the men uncomfortable. The basic shelter that the farm provided was overshadowed by what it lacked, the warmth and safety of home. The cold and depressing conditions were another grim reminder of captivity.

As has been previously mentioned in this thesis, Doctor Michael Godkin's theory of the relationship between space and identity construction contended that people form part of their identity from their connection to a place. Godkin argued that familiar objects could 'evoke some sense of belonging to a social group and provide a sense of group identity.'⁵⁵ Likewise, geographers Erica Carter, James Donald and Judith Squires noted how people gained aspects of their identities from the places they inhabited. They argued that places were areas that people had invested their time and energy, or more simply, 'Place is space to which meaning has been ascribed.'⁵⁶ The POWs' inability to interact and shape their environment beyond the wire represented a distinct contrast to their experiences within their permanent camps. POWs could shape the camp space into a more familiar environment through implementing elements of their pre-war lives. However, beyond the wire the men were often moved and the spaces they encountered remained confronting and foreign.

⁵⁵ Michael A. Godkin, 'Identity and Place: Clinical Applications Based on Notions of Rootedness and Uprootedness', in *The Human Experience of Place*, ed. by Anne Buttimer and David Seamon (London: Croom Helm, 1980), p. 73.

⁵⁶ *Space & Place: Theories of Identity and Location*, ed. by Erica Carter, James Donald and Judith Squires (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1993), p. xii.



Figure 6.4. Allied POWs outside an unknown barn.⁵⁷

After long days trekking through Europe, POWs often stayed in local barns. In figure 6.4. many POWs are depicted clustered outside a barn, with the men huddling together until they received orders to make camp for the night. At these stops, it was generally unclear what conditions the POWs would endure during their stay. It was common for POWs to feel apprehensive upon arrival at their destination. Tiffen noted the experience of staying in these barns, stating that on one occasion, ‘We got into a barn with 130 men and it looked pretty bleak. After a good feed of spuds it appeared quite an excellent barn.’⁵⁸

Tiffen’s suggestion that men felt disorientated when arriving at these barns indicated that some POWs were uncomfortable staying overnight in these

⁵⁷ Hill, Leighton McLeod, 1907-1952. Allied prisoners of war from Oflag IX A/Z outside barn - Photograph taken by Lee Hill. New Zealand. Department of Internal Affairs. War History Branch: Photographs relating to World War 1914-1918, World War 1939-1945, occupation of Japan, Korean War, and Malayan Emergency. Ref: 1/4-069793-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22319275>.

⁵⁸ Tiffen, p. 12.

villages. These stops were also an opportunity for the guards to display their power over the prisoners, with Gallichan stating that:

The Bauer wants to help us with food which he has collected from his tenants but the Hauptman will not permit it. The people of the town had made all arrangements to supply all P.O.W.s in the town with 2000 litres of hot soup but the Jerry command has scotched this too. So what could have been a wonderful billet is now a grim one.⁵⁹

It was revealing that Gallichan noted that the shelter should have been comfortable, but the guards used their power to inflict more hardships on the POWs. The local population appeared to be welcoming to the POWs, but the men were unable to receive the extra provisions because the guards withheld the food. This experience was confronting because the warmth of hot food and civility was so close, but still out of reach.

In addition to the greater authority of the guards, many men felt uneasy because of the crowded living conditions and lack of privacy. The descriptions of overnight conditions emphasised an absence of personal space, with many men cramped into a small area. Hobbs noted that:

The days of rest were more of a nuisance than of benefit. We were always in crowded quarters where we would be lucky if we could stretch out straight, and were always horribly stiff the following day when on the march again, taking several hours to walk it off.⁶⁰

Similarly, Private John Bettle was particularly harsh while describing the conditions his group endured during their stay at Gorlitz, with him noting that, 'Conditions a disgrace – 800 to a barrack. Herded like pigs. Slept in bathroom.'⁶¹ These accounts indicated that the POWs had limited opportunities to exhibit their individuality. This was in stark contrast to their experiences in the camp space,

⁵⁹ Gallichan, p. 46.

⁶⁰ Hobbs, p. 110.

⁶¹ John Bettle with Colin Amodeo, *Taking Life as it Comes: A Medical Unit Soldier's Story* (Christchurch: John Bettle, 1997), p. 75.

where men were able to distinguish themselves through a variety of leisure activities. Instead, on the march, the lack of personal space reduced men to uniform prisoners, struggling to survive.

It was telling that the POWs' experiences in these villages were confronting to their image of life beyond the wire. They were disoriented by the lack of familiar objects and routines of civilian life. The men's narratives emphasised the emptiness and remoteness of the towns they visited. And even though these hardships were temporary, their feeling of dislocation was compounded by the contrast between their current situation and the lives they had left behind in their camps. For many men, the ability to reconnect with their pre-war lives through participating in leisure activities and correspondence with loved ones back home allowed the camp to be reshaped into a more familiar space. However, when they were forced to march westwards they left these places of familiarity behind, and once again entered the unknown.

Still, not all of the men's experiences were disorienting. In some cases, the areas that POWs passed through contained small elements of familiarity. Gallichan recalled that occasionally his column passed a 'familiar Shell sign and I have also seen Vacuum Oil and Goodyear Tyres advertised. It is like a peep over our side of the fence.'⁶² Likewise, Gallagher noted that while walking through Bohemia he saw 'signs of English tourist days. There are names in English, such as "Hotel", "Garage", etc.'⁶³ Encountering an object or activity that reminded the men of their pre-war lives provided them with something to identify with. As Gallichan and Gallagher suggested, witnessing moments of normality, such as business advertisements, allowed men to envisage not only their past, but also their possible futures. These instances of familiarity and hope helped to brighten the POWs' otherwise isolating experience.

⁶² Gallichan, p. 24.

⁶³ Gallagher, p. 7.

This thesis has argued that the POW experience was impacted by spatial factors, and it was telling that the space beyond the wire was, at times, more confronting to the men's identities than the camp space. Part of the reason behind Hobbs' and Gallichan's trepidation was that many of the places that POWs visited were damaged by the war, and they soon noticed that the civilians had experienced hardships similar to their own captivity. In their study of the forced marches, Nichol and Rennell eloquently summed up the situation that confronted the men:

Streams of people were winding through the wreckage of Germany in those final months of the war. German refugees, slave labourers, concentration-camp inmates and prisoners of war of every nationality flowed westward in the cold and the damp, bedding down where they could, living off the land – or what was left of it by now.⁶⁴

This population exodus was encountered by New Zealand POWs, who often noted their shock at the appearance of civilians on the roads. Captain John Borrie remembered that:

Silhouetted against the snow-laden sky, along the road outside the station, wound an endless line of primitive, horse-drawn wagons. Huddled together, and clutching the last remains of their homes, were old men, women and children, whose drawn faces and sunken eyes spoke of terrible hardship.⁶⁵

Seeing the suffering of civilians was confronting for many POWs who had spent years interacting almost exclusively with guards and fellow prisoners. Although the images of civilians retreating indicated that the war was ending, most POWs took little pride in the hardships inflicted on these people. Private Alf Rawlings stated that while seeing the constant columns of civilian refugees, 'You can't help thinking as you see the women and children, that they might be your own mother, brothers or sisters.'⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Nichol and Rennell, p. 151.

⁶⁵ John Borrie, *Despite Captivity: A Doctor's Life as Prisoner of War* (New Zealand: Whitcoulls Limited, 1975), p. 218.

⁶⁶ Alf Rawlings, *Diary of Life in a Stalag* (Timaru: Alf Rawlings, 1991), p. 48.

In others instances, POWs were questioned by German forces why the Allies continued to target civilian areas. Hobbs noted in his diary that:

The German guards would indicate damage to civilian areas and ask us why the R.A.F. bombed harmless civilians. When we replied that the Luftwaffe was the first to introduce this type of warfare, and that this was only a taste of the indiscriminate bombing suffered by English homes early in the war, they merely shrugged their shoulders and said nothing.⁶⁷

Even though Hobbs reasoned that the POWs were not to blame for the destruction of Europe, encounters with civilians proved upsetting, with him stating:

Our marches through the towns attracted little attention from adults, and most people took little notice of us. Sometimes we would see an old lady with tears running down her face as she bemoaned the war and the hardships and losses it entailed, watching us march by.⁶⁸

Hobb's account revealed that the relationship between POWs and the war was complicated. The POWs were not involved in war activities but, in the minds of the guards and civilians, they were still affiliated with the Allied forces who were in a dominant power position. As Hobb's suggested, this resulted in POWs being judged and punished for the actions of others.

For many of the men who participated in the forced marches, this was the first instance where they saw the destruction of war. Life within the camp space was isolated and relatively safe, but outside the wire the men were confronted by sites of terror. Most men were distraught at what they saw, especially when they met people who had been incarcerated in concentration camps. Haigh noted in his memoir:

⁶⁷ Hobbs, p. 115.

⁶⁸ Hobbs, p. 111.

In addition to the many columns of our chaps on the road, there were large numbers of Russians, who were in a pitiful state. Far worse than these was a party of Jews, I saw, who resembled nothing more than living skeletons, and looked worse than any atrocity photos I have seen.⁶⁹

Similarly, Private Peter Winter remembered witnessing the horror of Nazism while on the march:

We came up with the column from Auschwitz while passing through a town. I thought I was hardened but found I was not. To the rear of the column those who had reached the end of their tether stumbled blindly along. Some fell to the ground and lay still, others tried to continue on hands and knees, while warmly clad Germans passed without a second glance. As the guards with their clubs performed their ritual mercy, the civilians showed neither pity nor concern.⁷⁰

The scene depicted by Winter suggested that the POWs struggled to understand how far humanity had fallen during their imprisonment. Winter thought that his captivity was challenging, but was left despondent after seeing the state of those who were interned in Auschwitz. He was confronted by the realisation that as bad the POWs' plight was, there were others who suffered much worse. It was significant that while he saw the execution of some detainees, he was powerless to stop it from happening.

These instances of witnessing Nazi brutality were prevalent throughout the POWs' accounts. These encounters left a mark, with many men feeling the need to document what they had seen. Seeing others suffering contributed to an uncomfortable atmosphere where deprivation and death were commonplace. Life in their prison camps bore some resemblance to their military and civilian lives, but out in the war-ravaged countryside they were disturbed by the horrors of war.

⁶⁹ Haigh, p. 2.

⁷⁰ Peter Winter, *Free Lodgings: The true story of a Kiwi soldier's amazing bid for freedom* (Auckland: Reed Books, 1993), pp. 123-24.

Some POWs were particularly upset when they were confronted by members of the Hitler Youth. Gallichan noted that it was difficult to know how to feel when witnessing these children committing atrocities:

A detachment of Hitler Youth passed us on one of the City streets, fully armed and equipped and evidently being sent in against the Russians somewhere. Poor kids I want to feel sorry for them but I can't – they're Germans. And those poor, dead Jews back there don't want me to feel sorry either.⁷¹

Gallichan noted that the presence of child soldiers complicated his view of the war. Some part of him wanted to protect these children from the conflict, taking on a guardian role similar to a father or older brother. However, the horrors of war had hardened his hatred of the Germans and he forced himself to remember that the child soldiers were the enemy. He suggested that their fate would be justice for those who had suffered atrocities.

Compounding the men's disgust at Nazi atrocities was their proximity to the continuing conflict. As prisoners, they were unable to defend themselves against their enemies, and this impotence was intensified by the dangers of being attacked by Allied troops. Signalman S.D. Pritchard noted in his diary that 'Our nerves were not too good at this stage what with bombing & strafing [*sic*]. Planes were overheard practically all the time.'⁷² Likewise, Hobbs stated that although his group was never attacked, he had heard that 'On several occasions allied prisoners of war on the march were mistaken by our own air force for German troops and suffered accordingly.'⁷³

⁷¹ Gallichan, p. 14.

⁷² S.D. Pritchard, Typescript Diary, 2000.335, The Kippenberger Military Archive, Waiouru, New Zealand, p. 4.

⁷³ Hobbs, p. 111.



Figure 6.5. Man wearing white sheet to indicate his status as a POW.⁷⁴

The threat of being attacked by Allied bombers was common in the men's accounts. Figure 6.5. shows one of the ways in which POWs marked themselves as prisoners, rather than enemy troops. During these marches POWs often carried white sheets to distinguish themselves from German forces. Gallichan described in his diary how POWs used white paint to communicate with Allied forces:

Yankee planes have been busy strafing the roads in this locality and the Jerries made us paint a big white P.O.W. on the roof. It did not take much urging I can tell you. It gives one some feeling of safety.⁷⁵

It was noteworthy that the POWs marked their territory in an attempt to identify themselves to Allied forces. Like Gallichan, Gallagher noted that, 'A large white P.O.W. is put on the roof of the building so we hope we will be safe when our fighter bombers get around this way.'⁷⁶ The accounts of both of these POWs

⁷⁴ Hill, Leighton McLeod, 1907-1952. Allied prisoners of war on forced march - Photograph taken by Lee Hill. New Zealand. Department of Internal Affairs. War History Branch: Photographs relating to World War 1914-1918, World War 1939-1945, occupation of Japan, Korean War, and Malayan Emergency. Ref: 1/4-069794-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22745437>.

⁷⁵ Gallichan, p. 86.

⁷⁶ Gallagher, p. 11.

suggested that identifying their area made them feel safer. The use of white paint showed that their area was peaceful, and helped to differentiate them from nearby enemy movements.



Figure 6.6. POWs watch as a German train is bombed.⁷⁷

The above photograph highlights how close the POWs were to the conflict. Viewing these bombings may have comforted the men by showing that they were closing in on friendly forces, but it also frayed the men's mental state as it represented a danger to their well-being. White sheets were visible in the middle of the photograph, indicating that the POWs signalled their presence to Allied airmen. Even when the prisoners were out of harm's way, being close to the conflict was disorientating for many men who had grown weary of the horrors of war. Gallichan noted that, 'More bombers were over this morning and another one

⁷⁷ Hill, Leighton McLeod, 1907-1952. Looking across field to bombed train - Photograph taken by Lee Hill. New Zealand. Department of Internal Affairs. War History Branch: Photographs relating to World War 1914-1918, World War 1939-1945, occupation of Japan, Korean War, and Malayan Emergency. Ref: 1/4-069800-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22348571>.

was shot down by the ack-ack. Two of the crew got clear and one parachute failed to open. We watched with horror as the poor fellow plummeted to earth.’⁷⁸

However, witnessing war activities did not always damage the men’s morale. In some instances the POWs were excited by the presence of Allied forces because their proximity to the conflict indicated to the men that the war was ending.

Gallichan stated that:

As we were marching along near Dollin today hundreds of Allied bombers, with fighter escort, passed high overhead and we waiting at the side of the road to watch them. There they were, silver in the sunlight, sailing serenely on in perfectly formed flights with the fighters, quick and busy, roaring here and there in protection. It was a tremendous sight and bucked us up considerably.⁷⁹

Gallichan’s statements indicated that seeing war activity was a complex experience. It was confronting to witness acts of violence and, selfishly, being near battles put the POWs in greater danger of being caught in the crossfire. However, the appearance of Allied forces showed POWs that their side was winning, and that they were not forgotten. This was a powerful morale booster to POWs who had continually been disempowered. The serene imagery associated with planes, flying freely overhead, was different to the harsh descriptions of life on the road. The planes were depicted as orderly and soaked in light, whereas previous accounts of the marches were characterised by disorder and darkness.

Most POWs saw conflict in the context of the Allied air force attacking German supply lines. Through this perspective, most men were spared the unpleasant details of battle. However, there were occasions when men witnessed ground forces fighting for small villages. Rae came to the dismaying realisation of the cost of war after the village he was staying in was the site of a fierce conflict. He recalled that:

⁷⁸ Gallichan, p. 110.

⁷⁹ Gallichan, p. 50.

All round were the signs of the price that had been paid just to reach the hill where our camp had been. The bodies of those on both sides of the conflict lay strewn around. And the countryside too showed the cost in dead cattle and other farm animals, mute reminders of the waste and horror of war.⁸⁰

Rae's experience led to his liberation, and it differed from many POWs' accounts because of its violence. Most POWs were simply abandoned by their guards, and were overtaken by friendly forces. Hobbs and his group were left in a remote village, and he recalled his experience of witnessing the arrival of American tanks, noting that, 'I cannot possibly describe our feelings at seeing these huge mechanical monsters thundering past. It was all just like a dream – a dream that was far too good to be true.'⁸¹ Vercoe remembered a similar encounter, noting:

Yelling and cheering – some blokes mustering a sort of dance – we left the road, the guards forgotten, and hopped over the ditch, to stream across the field. Soon the tanks were surrounded, and those of the crews were riding on top were tossing us chocolate, cigarettes, any K-rations they had with them.⁸²

While these encounters placed the tanks at the centre of their liberation narrative, the men's jubilation was not diminished by the limited personal interaction with their saviours. Vercoe noted how these foreign scenes were made familiar by the appearance of the tank crews and distribution of food which was so scarce in captivity.

⁸⁰ Rae, p. 165.

⁸¹ Hobbs, p. 133.

⁸² Vercoe, p. 190.



Figure 6.7. POWs greet United States soldiers.⁸³

The above photograph illustrates the excitement that some POWs experienced upon their liberation. The picture shows the POWs looking to shake the hands of the troops in the jeep, and was indicative of many similar encounters. Gallichan remembered encountering his American liberators, noting that it was ‘one of the greatest sights I’m ever likely to see in my lifetime. They had their tank and their jeep parked under trees on the outskirts of the village. There was hand-shaking and congratulations all round.’⁸⁴ Even these non-violent releases were disorientating to the men. For years they had imagined the moment of their freedom, but the reality of the situation left many POWs uneasy. Hogg remembered that, ‘To find the guards had left their rifles and taken off was staggering. We were in much doubt as to what we should do. To be free was hard to grasp.’⁸⁵ In many cases, the suddenness of liberation was disorientating for the

⁸³ Hill, Leighton McLeod, 1907-1952. Liberated prisoners of war greeting United States soldiers - Photograph taken by Lee Hill. New Zealand. Department of Internal Affairs. War History Branch: Photographs relating to World War 1914-1918, World War 1939-1945, occupation of Japan, Korean War, and Malayan Emergency. Ref: 1/4-069779-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. <http://natlib.govt.nz/records/23020187>.

⁸⁴ Gallichan, p. 121.

⁸⁵ Hogg, p. 64.

men, and the realisation that they were no longer prisoners was overwhelming. Gallagher noted that:

It was so long in coming that I felt nothing, or very little. Nothing.

I was grateful to shake hands with the chap on the tank, with the reconnaissance tank group that arrived where we were. We knew it was the end but we were so weary, I think it had been so long coming, that I just accepted it.⁸⁶

The accounts of Gallagher and Hogg represented a common liberation experience. Years of captivity had given men time to dream of their eventual freedom. A significant aspect of their imagined futures was contemplating how they would be released. However, the weariness of an extended march through Europe had drained the POWs. When they were eventually freed, many were struck by how their experience differed from their imagined liberation. There was celebrating by some POWs, but many were emotionless when they expected to be jubilant.

In the aftermath of celebrations, both colourful and muted, the POWs realised that the power relationships between themselves and the guards had finally reversed. Some POWs, like Tiffen, enjoyed this sudden change, with him stating that the Allied troops ‘soon got to work rounding up the Jerry soldiers, and to see these new prisoners get herded together, searched and marched off, accentuated our wonderful feeling of freedom.’⁸⁷ Likewise, Sapper Leonard Christmas noted that, ‘It was very nice for us to see the Jerries behind the wire after four years of it ourselves.’⁸⁸ These accounts suggested that the POWs showed little sympathy toward the Germans who were faced with the prospect of captivity. Instead, Tiffen and Christmas expressed satisfaction at seeing the guards’ transition from soldiers to captives. Their liberation experience was more impactful because they contrasted their freedom with the captivity of their enemy. It was also revealing how Tiffen dehumanised the Germans by noting that they were ‘herded’ into

⁸⁶ *Inside Stories: New Zealand Prisoners of War Remember*, ed. by Megan Hutching (Auckland: Harper Collins, 2002), p. 185.

⁸⁷ Tiffen, p. 18.

⁸⁸ Leonard Christmas, Typescript Diary, MS-Papers-8801, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, p. 4.

groups. This animal imagery was constant in many of the previous extracts, and it was significant that in the final moments of captivity this relationship was reversed.

In summary, the narratives of New Zealand POWs on the forced marches emphasised how aspects of their camp lives stayed with them beyond the wire. It is telling that many of the themes that have previously been examined in this thesis, such as economic deprivation, isolation and disorientation, were once again brought to the forefront in the men's last months of captivity. The harsh physical and economic conditions provided ample opportunities for men to take advantage of one another. These revelations are in stark contrast to the more romantic histories that portray POWs banding together to overcome the oppressive guards. The POWs studied in this thesis noted many occasions when men stole supplies at the expense of another POW.

Furthermore, this chapter highlighted how the power relationship between guards and prisoners changed as the march progressed. Beyond the wire the guards were limited in their ability to separate themselves from the prisoners, so a shared living space developed. In many cases, the guards experienced similar hardships to the POWs. However, the guards still retained power, and some guards used this authority to deprive the POWs of supplies.

Compounding these uncertain relationships was the confronting spaces that POWs encountered on the march. For many men, years of imprisonment had strengthened an image of an ideal world outside the camp space. However, the desolation and destruction that they encountered contrasted these idyllic images. POWs were disoriented by these haunting spaces, and this confusion was exaggerated because they had left a camp space that they had shaped into a more familiar environment.

The accounts of New Zealand POWs who moved through Nazi-occupied villages emphasised a foreign experience which differed from their expectations. They were shocked at the destruction they saw, and were disturbed by the impact that the war had on the civilian population. These spaces were so foreign that men lamented having to stay overnight, with many preferring to keep marching. The aspects of war that they were protected from while in the POW camps became all too confronting beyond the wire.

Conclusion

While scholarly interest in the POW experience has increased in recent years, this thesis provides a fresh analysis of New Zealand POWs in the European theatre of war in World War Two. The study developed as a challenge of glamorised portrayals of captivity and escapes. Captured soldiers did not fit within the popular notion of men triumphing in battle. And unlike those who died in World War One at Gallipoli or on the Western Front, their experience did not end on the battlefield. Even when authors examined POWs, they were often portrayed as a unified group, working together to disrupt the enemy from behind the wire. The New Zealand POW experience is not a brief tale punctuated by escapes and sabotage; it is a complex narrative that emphasises individualism and a broader definition of resistance. This Conclusion summarises the contribution this thesis makes to our knowledge and understanding of captivity.

The study is the culmination of an immense research phase, which included a detailed analysis of many diaries, letters, memoirs and scrapbooks. These sources were written by New Zealand POWs during and after captivity. Most of these accounts were accessed at the Kippenberger Military Archive and the Alexander Turnbull Library, as well as other research facilities in New Zealand. Although comprehensive, this thesis is limited by these sources. Many documents were examined, but these represent only a fragment of the men's imprisonment. With most of the diaries and letters deteriorating in condition, it remains probable that many other sources did not survive the rigours of captivity. Men were subjected to frequent searches and often discarded items when they were moved to another camp. Other accounts may have been lost since the end of the war or kept privately by the men's families. Moreover, not all prisoners documented their experience, because some lacked the required literacy and others did not feel compelled to detail their largely monotonous existence. Most accounts lack harsh details of death or acute suffering, an absence which some readers may criticise as painting a favourable narrative of captivity. However, it was likely that prisoners who suffered severe brutality were too traumatised to document the harrowing

details of their experience. This has meant that the sources available are from men who wanted to tell their story, which raises questions about their motivation for writing and the extent to which they self-censored their experience. This problem is particularly troublesome in accounts written post-captivity, which, in most cases, emphasise exciting tales over daily tedium. Nevertheless, these memoirs reveal how men felt about their imprisonment. Their candid reflections are fascinating insights into how POWs continued to contest their captivity.

Identity construction was a central theme in this thesis, because not only did captivity restrict the prisoners' physical freedoms, but it also limited their ability to express themselves. The daily routines, bland food and uniform clothing were dehumanising, and many men lost aspects of their individuality. However, when reading the POWs' accounts, the way in which men withstood these pressures and maintained a sense of individualism stood out. Prisoners may have had similar experiences, but their story was always personal. For many prisoners, proclaiming oneself as an individual was their first act of resistance.

This thesis has shown that captivity was both strange and vastly different to what the POWs had expected of their wartime experience. The thesis was structured on three phases: capture, resisting captivity and then the shift out of captivity. It presents the POW experience as one of dislocation, followed by an extended period of stability, when the men tried to resist their situation, and then the men's eventual liberation. This argument began when the men were confronted by their transition from soldiers to captives on the battlefields of Greece, Crete and North Africa. Prisoners resisted captivity by reinterpreting their capture. A common narrative that appeared in the men's accounts described how they shifted the blame for their predicament from their own actions to the inaction of their superiors. The confusion and impotence of their capture was recast as a brave, yet hopeless, attempt to defend the freedom of others, at the cost of their own. Comprehending their defeat on the battlefield did not necessarily reinstitute their soldier identities, but it showed how they resisted being labelled as mere captives.

The middle phase of the thesis, which focused on resistance, began with an examination of the men's attempts to escape captivity. Physical escapes have been the focus of previous studies, and, rather than repeating prior narratives, this thesis has provided a more nuanced analysis of this type of resistance. Too often these men have been reduced to generalisations which invariably characterised them as defeated soldiers who tried to continue their duty by fighting the enemy from behind the wire. While this was accurate of some men's experience, others were not motivated by a sense of duty. Some escapees and saboteurs disrupted the enemy because they wanted to inject adventure and chance into a monotonous existence. Escapes were an opportunity to project power, it was an activity where the POWs switched positions with the guards; rather than being constantly watched, the prisoners observed their captors to uncover their routines and weaknesses. In the lead up to escapes, prisoners imagined how they would outwit the guards; in this mental space, the restrictions of captivity were suspended in favour of dreams with endless possibilities.

Although physical acts of defiance have dominated histories of captivity, a more multifaceted approach to resistance has shown that prisoners exhibited some control over their lives when choosing how to spend their free time. Sports, theatre, reading, writing and other hobbies were effective ways of contesting their captive identity. Whether it was collective experiences, like being in a sports team or part of a theatrical production, or singular pursuits, like reading or writing, leisure activities reminded POWs of their pre-war lives. In addition to asserting their individualism, prisoners used leisure activities to contest the spaces they were held in. For brief periods of time, camps were transformed into sports arenas, theatre halls, libraries and school rooms. The return on these familiar spaces allowed prisoners to momentarily transcend the restrictions of captivity.

This thesis has debunked the simplified portrayals of captivity, in which men united to disrupt the guards and endure their ordeal. It has revealed a more complex, individual experience where men did not necessarily fit into heroic archetypes. The privations of the captivity, particularly food shortages, proved

disruptive to camp unity. Simple economic systems began as a way in which prisoners could exchange goods and services, but, inevitably, inequalities appeared. Many camp markets used cigarettes as a medium of exchange, but prices fluctuated because supplies were volatile. For those who planned for these shocks, there was a chance to extort better prices from those who were less organised. In other cases, there was intense internal competition for favourable work places. Even though it was morally ambiguous, working for the enemy usually meant better supplies. And when faced with the choice between morals or food, many chose the latter. The privations of captivity forced some men to forsake any notions of unity, with some resorting to stealing from other prisoners. The competition for supplies pitted prisoners against each other, and the revelation that POWs were willing and able to exploit one another stands in stark contrast to the idolisation of men who supposedly banded together.

Although activities made life more bearable, many prisoners still experienced moments when they felt isolated. When conditions allowed, letter writing bridged the vast distance between the camps and home, reconnecting prisoners with their loved ones. This correspondence was a metaphorical escape where prisoners imagined life back in New Zealand. However, these connections were unreliable; POWs often complained about receiving no letters, only to have a backload of several months arrive all at once. POWs endured agonising periods of uncertainty, as they waited to hear from loved ones. When letters were delayed, prisoners openly wondered if they had been forgotten. Nevertheless, this thesis has shown that frequent correspondence enabled men to maintain their relationships with their family and friends. Letters gave prisoners a glimpse of life beyond the wire, and the details fuelled their imaginations, as they dreamed of life after captivity. Some POWs noted how correspondence prompted nostalgic reflections; when captivity became too distressing, the men escaped into memories of a happier time.

Through analysing the prisoners' resistance to captivity, this thesis has revealed an intimate depiction of the POW experience. Emphasising the individual

experience revealed how some men struggled with captivity. Many prisoners suffered from depression from the immense mental pressures of imprisonment, with accounts noting that some men were overwhelmed by their situation. In this environment of uncertainty and despair, there were examples of men banding together to help those who were suffering from mental illnesses. These efforts gave much needed support to prisoners, but often the need to prioritise one's own wellbeing meant that men suffered alone. This thesis asserts that the uncomfortable details of captivity, including depression and suicides, has to feature within New Zealand's wartime narrative. The POW experience was bleak and consisted of a daily internal struggle to maintain hope.

The men's resistance and endurance was tested during the last period of captivity. Many POW camps were located in Eastern Germany and Poland, and as the war progressed, these camps were in danger of being overrun by advancing Russian troops. Because of this possibility, many New Zealanders were forcibly marched westwards in the closing months of the war. This movement at gun point resulted in a sudden upheaval of the lives that POWs had constructed within the camps. The thesis highlights how men scrambled to gather their possessions for the march, only to recognise that some items which held value in the camps were worthless outside the wire. Items that prisoners collected as keepsakes were thrown out along the roadsides of Europe. Without these possessions, the POWs became disconnected from the lives they had created over several years of captivity. No longer within the confined, yet familiar camp space, men once again were confronted by the foreignness of their surroundings.

For most of the men's captivity, the camps were insulated from the horrific visual details of war. However, on the marches POWs were distressed by the desolation and destruction they saw. The POWs had envisioned the world beyond the wire as an idyllic space; instead, they were confronted by the plight of civilians and visible war damage. Some prisoners remembered the shock of seeing these once tranquil villages being torn apart by the conflict. At points during the march, POWs openly lamented having to stop and stay in these towns. On the surface the

places looked familiar, but they lacked the warmth and security of home. While in their camps, the prisoners were able to shape their surroundings to make a more comfortable place, but men had no such opportunity on the road. They simply had to endure.

While other historians have discussed the confronting nature of war, most have neglected those who were captured or have romanticised their experience. This thesis argues that the POW experience was particularly disorienting, because captivity was the antithesis of many men's expected wartime narrative. Their feelings of dislocation were compounded by the unfamiliarity of the spaces they inhabited; camps lacked the warmth and security of home. However, in spite of daily hardships, prisoners tried to control their experience by engaging in physical and mental activities. These activities were escapes where they distanced themselves from their captive identities. This topic developed as a rejection of the grand narratives that are often found in bookstores or expressed at war commemorations. These stories give a simplistic portrayal of New Zealand's wartime experience. Unfortunately, tales of valiant young men fighting against enormous odds are more profitable than descriptions of boredom or overwhelming isolation. While it is hard to envisage the unfamiliarity of captivity, this thesis argues that through detailed and nuanced analysis of first-hand accounts we can garner an understanding of these men's experiences. It is hoped that scholars will continue to contest the simplicity of New Zealand wartime histories. These fresh approaches will conflict with previous narratives, but may result in a deeper understanding of the personal and diverse experiences of war and captivity.

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